

Defining the Divine:
An Exploration of the Relationships Between Gods and Mortals in Fantasy Literature
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To Mom, who always knows just what to say to encourage me and who is never too busy for a little philosophical, theological discussion.

And to Dad, who has always told me, "Do your best, and be yourself." Dad, here's my best, and, in writing it, I have indeed stayed true to myself.

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Abstract

Many authors of fantasy literature choose to include gods as characters in their works. A likely reason for this is that god-characters in these works effectively define humanity through their relationships with mortals—relationships that may differ depending on the type of god. A god as a character is both similar to and different from a mortal character. Because these gods are characters, mortal characters and readers can relate to them, perceiving them as, in some way, human. However, because the god-characters are also gods, they are imbued with a potential for authority. This enables them to present an example of humanity after which mortals can model themselves. In order to provide this example and define the humanity of mortals, the gods enter into relationships with mortals. However, as characters, the gods are also individuals, and different types of gods define humanity through different kinds of relationships. These types of gods also promote varying degrees of independence in their mortal followers, which in turn affect the amount of agency humans have in their own definition—whether humanity is a product of free will or fate.

Chapter One reveals that different types of gods, even in the world of reality, define humanity and relate to mortals in different ways. An expansive example is drawn from the Pentateuch, demonstrating how, as the Hebrew people changed, God also evolved. If one type of god's definition of humanity would always be appropriate to all mortals, then God would have had no cause to change along with the Hebrews. The second half of this chapter presents the taxonomy used to classify god-characters into four categories: independent multideity, created multideity, independent monodeity, and created monodeity.

Chapter Two analyzes the concept of independent multideities, arguing that these gods are permanently and metaphorically the adults of their fantasy works, with mortals in the role of children. One of these adults enters into the role of parent with a particular mortal or group of mortals, taking a special interest in those individuals as parents take a special interest in their own children. As a parent ideally should, the parent-gods encourage some independent action in their mortal affiliates. However, because the mortals still encounter situations that they cannot handle alone, they continue to require the help of the gods, who remain thus in the role of protective parent. Works examined within this category are *The Song of the Lioness* quartet by Tamora Pierce, *Tailchaser's Song* by Tad Williams, and *Silverwing* and *Sunwing* by Kenneth Oppel.

Chapter Three addresses created multideities, which still serve as the adults to the mortal children. However, in these works, mortals are grown children. The parent in these works is the equal of the gods, sometimes a created god, sometimes an individual with comparable authority to the gods. This god-equal's parental task is to help the mortal children understand that they are grown, that they are themselves adults. They need not rely on the gods they have created any longer, but may act to define themselves. This process is seen in works like Octavia Butler's *Wild Seed*, Roger Zelazny's *Lord of Light*, and Terry Pratchett's *Small Gods*.

Chapter Four discusses the monodeities, which are, interestingly, the least parental type of god. Rather, a monodeity's relationship with human beings is more like that between a god—a singular, omnipotent being—and his worshippers. Independent monodeities are more godlike than parent-like for several reasons. They possess absolute authority and stand unchallenged by other gods, they rarely, if ever, require human belief to act, and they simultaneously define disparate versions of humanity. Independent monodeities are found in works like C.S. Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, David Clement-Davies' *Fire Bringer*, and J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Silmarillion*. The rarity of created monodeity works is also examined.

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Short Titles

- Silver:* Oppel, Kenneth. *Silverwing*. New York: Aladdin Paperbacks, 1999. Print.
- Sun:* Oppel, Kenneth. *Sunwing*. New York: Simon and Schuster Books for Young Readers, 2000. Print.
- Alanna:* Pierce, Tamora. *The Song of the Lioness: Alanna, The First Adventure*. 1983. New York: Random House, 1997. Print.
- Hand:* Pierce, Tamora. *The Song of the Lioness: In the Hand of the Goddess*. 1984. New York: Random House, 1997. Print.
- Woman:* Pierce, Tamora. *The Song of the Lioness: The Woman who Rides like a Man*. 1986. New York: Random House, 1997. Print.
- Lioness:* Pierce, Tamora. *The Song of the Lioness: Lioness Rampant*. 1988. New York: Random House, 1997. Print.

Introduction

Looking for Fresh Vision

About 9,000 years ago in Turkey, an inhabitant of the then-flourishing city known to archaeologists today as Catalhöyük crafted a clay sculpture of a woman. The figure was rotund, perhaps pregnant, with exaggerated breasts and hips. She was seated on a detailed chair, perhaps a throne, and her hands rested on the heads of two lionesses. According to an excavator working thousands of years later, this figure and the several others like it found at the site likely represented “fertility or mother goddesses.”¹ Though almost certainly not the first place where human beings worshipped gods and goddesses, Catalhöyük was definitely not the last. Gods decorate the walls of pyramids, both Mayan and Egyptian. They echo through the mythologies of ancient Rome and Greece, enacting human drama on an Olympian stage. They populate the pages of ancient holy texts—the Vedas, the Torah, the gospels, and the Qur’an. And they are still worshipped today, in temples and cathedrals, mosques and synagogues, by the majority of human beings around the globe. Clearly, belief in gods has been a significant element in the history of humanity, and continues to be so in the present day. Regardless of whether or not an individual personally believes a god or gods exist, he or she cannot deny that gods, and their relationship with humankind, are cherished in stories worldwide, holding a great deal of significance for many people and many cultures.

Given such a longstanding history, it is hardly surprising that this relationship between gods and humans is the focus of many works of literature. While works of realistic fiction detailing the relationship between gods and humans might fare better in terms of the literary

¹ Kenneth L. Feder, *The Past in Perspective: An Introduction to Human Prehistory*, 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 424. Hereafter cited in the text.

criticism and analysis afforded them, surprisingly little work has been done regarding the gods of fantasy literature. Despite writing about worlds where the rules are different than those of a reader's reality, where, supposedly, anything can happen, many fantasy authors still incorporate gods into their works, their worlds. Many of these gods are characters in their own right within the context of the story, and, just as with mortal characters, no two god-characters are exactly alike. Types exist, however, even among individuals, and such is certainly the case with god-characters in fantasy literature. Different types of gods not only exist, but interact with human beings in different ways, entering into different kinds of relationships with the mortals of their respective fantasy worlds.

The fact that the gods are characters offers both author and reader the chance to consider this relationship between human and god in an interesting way. Within the world of reality, belief in the existence of gods rests almost exclusively on faith. While religion in reality may be an area of study, gods cannot be, simply because their existence cannot be proven.² In fantasy works, however, authors have the advantage of being able to demonstrate the existence of gods in a particular world by casting them as characters able to interact directly with the mortals. Aslan, for example, in C.S. Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch, and The Wardrobe*, is seen not only strategizing and speaking with the Pevensie children and the Narnians, but joking and playing with them. The Great Mother Goddess of Tamora Pierce's *The Song of the Lioness* quartet often joins the protagonist Alanna at her campfire, sharing personal and personable conversations, while Om, one of the gods of Terry Pratchett's *Small Gods*, constantly argues and bickers with the mortal character Brutha.

² This is not necessarily the case. Followers of some faiths believe they see and interact with gods in nature, while other individuals claim to have personally spoken with, for example, Christ. However, for a significant number of people, the existence of gods is nevertheless a matter of faith alone.

But why would authors of fantasy, who can establish the rules of their worlds in almost any way they choose, include gods at all? If one applies to fantasy texts Sylvia Kelso's interpretation that the function of gods in a mythological narrative is to "provide the enabling device that supports belief in... non-real events," then gods would indeed be superfluous in a great deal of fantasy.³ The enabling device therein would instead be magic. According to Kelso, because magic in fantasy often performs the function that gods in myth perform, gods need not, and rarely do, "appear as functioning visible actors" in a fantasy world (62). The wealth of god-characters that will be discussed in this thesis, however, from Aslan of *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* to Zotz of *Silverwing* and *Sunwing*, refute this completely. Within fantasy texts, gods not only can and do exist, but exist in great diversity. Kelso also omits from her argument fantasy that incorporates both gods and magic. She does not acknowledge works in which gods provide magical power, as Herne provides Rannoch in David Clement-Davies's *Fire Bringer*; works in which magical powers give characters the identity of gods, as Anyanwu's and Doro's superhuman powers do in Octavia Butler's *Wild Seed*; and works in which magical powers exist in harmony with gods, as seen in Pierce's *The Song of the Lioness* quartet.

As characters, gods display a wide range of appearances, personalities, and values, just as mortal characters do. Nocturna, for example, a bat-goddess found in Kenneth Oppel's *Silverwing* and *Sunwing*, favors a certain independence, both for herself and in her worshippers, and appears far more distant than the benevolent Aslan or the motherly Anyanwu. Ilúvatar, the all-knowing creator god of J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Silmarillion*, watches the world of Middle-Earth sedately from the Void, a far cry from the cat-god Firefoot, who walks among the mortals of Tad Williams' *Tailchaser's Song*, or Om of *Small Gods*, who spends much of the novel traveling in

³ Sylvia Kelso, "The God in the Pentagram: Religion and Spirituality in Modern Fantasy," *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* 18.1 (2007): 65. Hereafter cited in the text.

the form of a tortoise, grumbling and complaining all the way. With so many distinct individuals filling the role of a god, it is likely all but impossible to determine a role that *all* gods would play in *all* fantasy works boasting a god-character. However, one role that a significant number of the god-characters do seem to play is that of defining humanity within the bounds of their fantasy worlds. The role of gods like Herne is to guide mortals down certain paths, toward certain definitions of humanity, to demonstrate or teach just what it is, and what it means, to be human in a fantasy world—and the fact that the gods can fill this role so readily may serve as a contributing factor for their inclusion in fantasy works.

According to fantasy theorist Lucie Armitt, writers of fantasy must develop a balance between the familiar and the otherworldly in their works, in order to create a world that is at once fantastically different from the world of reality, but also comprehensible to readers who live, obviously, within the world of reality. Armitt describes the realms of fantasy as existing on a vertical axis, while the world of reality moves along a horizontal one. The challenge for authors of fantasy “is to take that vertical trajectory and give it a more grounded dimension while still enabling it to take flight.”⁴ For Armitt, the concept of the horizon then represents a successful fantasy world. Like the horizon, that world is something clearly visible and relatively understandable, but never quite tangible, never quite reachable. The best fantasy immerses the reader in this secondary world, enforcing its reality without requiring a reader to belong to that reality. Fantasy creates a setting in which actions occur according to a different set of rules than those governing the reader’s world of reality, a set of rules nevertheless accepted as normal within the fantasy world. This secondary world is also “specific enough in its version of heroism, comradeship, and corruption to mirror the world we know” (Armitt 10). While

⁴ Lucie Armitt, *Fantasy Fiction: An Introduction* (New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group, 2005), 4. Hereafter cited in the text.

Tailchaser of *Tailchaser's Song* may be an anthropomorphized cat, a reader nevertheless still finds himself or herself able to empathize with the character as he searches for a lost loved one, worries about a sick companion, and swaps stories with his friends. In fantasy, differences exist in circumstances, even in natural law, yet there is often something within the humans—or within the intelligent beings that fill the role of humans in a fantasy work—that is inherently recognizable to readers. The outer world changes, but something of the inner world of human beings remains the same.

Fantasy also contains other elements familiar to readers in the world of reality. In her work with the genre, Sheila Egoff notes that worlds of fantasy may be used to reflect upon the world of reality, to “express dissatisfaction with society, to comment on human nature, or to bridge the gap between the visible and invisible worlds.”⁵ The inherent difference of a fantasy world from reality allows the reader a distance helpful in drawing effective, meaningful parallels between elements of a fantasy world and the world of reality. For Egoff and other fantasy theorists and authors, “fantasy is not meant to keep us in a never-land of the unreal but to return us to reality with a fresh vision of our own world and of ourselves” (Egoff 15). Fantasy writing offers for its readers a setting in which one is not bound strictly by the laws of one’s reality; rather, it allows more freedom to create and explore other worlds, to cultivate this fresh vision. Encountering something in a fantasy setting, under different conditions than those to which one may be accustomed, may lead one to experience a change, or at least a complication, in one’s own perception of a similar thing within one’s own reality. Pratchett’s *Small Gods*, for example, critiques organized religion that has overstepped its bounds. As a scholar in the work reads, “Around the Godde there forms a Shelle of prayers and Ceremonies and Buildings... until at

⁵ Sheila A. Egoff, *Worlds Within: Children's Fantasy from the Middle Ages to Today* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1988), 1. Hereafter cited in the text.

Last the Godde Dies. Ande this may notte be noticed.”⁶ While a religion may be worthwhile as long as it truly follows the mandates and teachings of a god, religion itself may supplant the god, with people believing only in the structure of a church—a frightening thought when, as in *Small Gods*, those at the helm of the faith are at best sadistic or insane, and at worst a potent mix of both. A text like this, then, counsels readers to consider in what they might actually have put their faith.

In terms of faith in fantasy works, Vox Day laments that fantasy writers fail to get religion “right” within their works.⁷ Because religious belief has had such a widespread impact on many aspects of the world of reality, Day asserts that it should also be a primary shaper in worlds of fantasy. The myriad cultures therein should have “some element of religious faith [in order] to be convincing, given that the overwhelming majority of historical cultures were centered, at some level, around faith” (Day 224). Day, however, crosses a line in intimating that fantasy worlds are in some way compelled to mirror reality. Were fantasy to do so, it could stray completely outside the bounds of what might actually be definable as *fantasy*. By its very nature, fantasy is not compelled to slavishly imitate the real. If, for example, a fantasy world were reminiscent of medieval Europe, the author would in no way be compelled to include the Catholic Church, which, for Day, is the “most quintessentially medieval institution” (225). *The Song of the Lioness* quartet certainly demonstrates that, for worship in the books may be offered to any number of gods, from the Great Mother Goddess to Mithros to Yahzed to the Crooked God. The author trusts other familiar or popularized aspects of medieval Europe—chivalric codes, knighthood, and quests—to give readers signposts of the recognizable from their own

⁶ Terry Pratchett, *Small Gods*, 1994 (New York: Harper, 2008), 177. Hereafter cited in the text.

⁷ Vox Day, “C.S. Lewis and the Problem of Religion in Science Fiction and Fantasy,” *Revisiting Narnia: Fantasy, Myth, and Religion in C.S. Lewis’ Chronicles*, Ed. Shanna Caughey (Dallas: Benbella Books, Inc., 2005), 224. Hereafter cited in the text.

reality. Again, the world of fantasy should not be entirely foreign to the reader, for the horizon is something most everyone can see. Yet there is no law prescribing that the horizon must be identical to the present area one inhabits. Such a precise and accurate description may cross the borderline of fantasy itself, straying into historical fiction or even historical study. And if religions, as Day suggests, were carbon-copied from the world of reality into the fantasy world, to appear exactly the same in every aspect, for a reader to develop a new outlook would be all but impossible. The fresh vision Egoff describes would not be readily attainable, for a reader would be seeing something exactly like that to which he or she was accustomed.

In regard to the study of gods within the fantasy world, it is fortuitous that gods do not, in fact, need to be presented exactly as they are in the world of reality—else works in which one could examine the role of a god as a character would be few and far between. In fact, according to Robert Reilly, one of the chief reasons for studying religion and gods in a fantasy setting is the fantasy setting itself. Because the story takes place in a world bound by different rules, a reader can see “what religion might become under vastly altered circumstances.”⁸ These vastly altered circumstances are what encourage a reader’s speculation and thought, which may then lead to Egoff’s fresh vision of reality. And this line of reasoning, of course, may apply to any element existing within a fantasy setting. For example, in works containing gods, a reader would be able to consider what gods, and the relationship between deities and human beings, would be like under vastly altered circumstances.

Joseph Francavilla’s essay takes this a step farther, considering not only the different relationships between gods and mortals, but the impacts these relationships might have on mortals—both characters and readers. Gods in the works of Roger Zelazny, rather than

⁸ Robert Reilly, ed., *The Transcendent Adventure: Studies of Religion in Science Fiction/Fantasy* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1985), 6. Hereafter cited in the text.

elaborating on the possible manifestations of godhood, instead “vastly extend the range of experiences and the potential of humanity; Zelazny is defining ‘human’ in terms of the ‘divine,’ showing the qualities of gods that can be imparted to man... to answer the question ‘What is a man?’”⁹ Sam, for example, placed in the role of god in Zelazny’s *Lord of Light*, is instrumental in helping the mortals regain technology that the gods have kept from them for generations, finally giving humanity another option besides savagery or utter subservience. Guiding the mortals toward rebuilding a civilization, Sam is defining them, teaching them how to live as human beings. And this role is not limited to Zelazny’s gods. Almost all gods in fantasy literature, regardless of whatever other role they might play within their fantasy worlds, serve, in some capacity, the purpose of defining humanity. Thus, when examining how gods might be expected to function under vastly altered circumstances, one is also witnessing how human beings might function under these circumstances. And when a reader receives a fresh vision of gods, one is also receiving a fresh vision of humanity.

But what is it about gods that enables them to define what it means to be human? There is something behind the term “god” itself that gives a character identified as such an aura of authority. The word from which “god” evolved meant “to call upon” or “to invoke,” which itself means “to implore.”¹⁰ The term “god” itself is thus rooted in the asking of one with power for assistance. This authority is not necessarily universal, however, encompassing all incarnations of godhood. Rather, it is the *potential* for authority. Even if the actual authority of a god within a work is limited, illusory, or all but non-existent, the potentiality is still there. By their very nature, by the very term allotted to them by the author of a work, gods have the capability to

⁹ Joseph V. Francavilla, “Promethean Bound: Heroes and Gods in Roger Zelazny’s Science Fiction,” *The Transcendent Adventure: Studies of Religion in Science Fiction/Fantasy*, ed. Robert Reilly (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1985) 220-221. Hereafter cited in the text.

¹⁰ Douglas Harper, *Online Etymology Dictionary*, (23 February 2011). Hereafter cited in the text.

define humanity. In *Small Gods*, author Terry Pratchett addresses this idea of potential authority. There are literally “millions of gods” in this work, but most are highly localized—the god of a blade of grass or a drop of dew (Pratchett 108). Every one of these small gods, however, has the ability to become a greater god. “Any god could join. Any god could start small. Any god could grow in stature as its believers increased” (108). While a god may not always have the ability to exercise its authority, whenever the term “god” is used, the shadow of possible authority always exists.

The fact that the gods in a work of fantasy are linked with humanity, rarely existing in a human-free vacuum, is part of why gods warrant study, as an influential relationship exists between god and human. In *I and Thou*, Martin Buber describes a similar relationship between an “I” and a “You.” The You is almost cosmic, a present and all but indescribable perception of all things in their entirety at once—and this You is, in some sense, God. The goal here is relation, between the human I and the divine You, for it is through this relation that humanity may be fully realized.¹¹ According to Buber, “persons appear by entering into relation with other persons.”¹² For an individual to be a person, to be truly human, relation to other human beings is essential. That is not to say that people outside of relation do not exist, but merely that they exist as ego, set apart. Living as an ego simply means “dying one human life long”—an ego is only the individual and is not connected to, or part of, anything greater (Buber 112). As for the alternative, “the purpose of relation is the relation itself—touching the You.”¹³ For as soon as we

¹¹ It is important to note that I adapt only the aspect of relationship from Buber’s argument. His depiction of God as You is thorny and problematic, sometimes too specified and often not specified enough. At times, his choice of language associates the idea of “God” with the Judeo-Christian God; at others, with a divine, supernatural miasma of all and everything at once, something like a Platonic form of forms. These parts of his argument are not applicable here, because they either do not relate to gods in general or to gods as characters. Thus, they have been excluded from this argument.

¹² Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, Trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1970), 112. Hereafter cited in the text.

¹³ Again, this is a term used relatively interchangeably with “God” in parts of Buber’s work.

touch a You, we are touched by a breath of eternal life” (112-113). As a Christian overtone seems to color much of Buber’s work, he may here mean heaven or transcendence. But adapted slightly from this context, this could also be perceived as touching upon something eternal—that through this relation between god and humankind, humanity is able, in some way, to access, if not the full and complete version of itself, at least a fuller and more complete version.

For Buber, this relationship between God and human beings seems almost innate. Describing the Gospel of John, Buber asserts that “God and man... are actually and forever Two, the two partners of the primal relationship” (133). Again, this is not suggesting a forced symbiosis, that one member of the relationship would perish without the other. A partner can, in fact, exist separate from the other partner—this is why they are Two, and not One. What this does suggest, however, is that human and god are part of one another, that there is benefit to relation between the two—for indeed, the term “partner” indicates a second person. Buber also implies that, by its very nature, a god itself would be part of, or at least open to, a relationship with humanity. Through a Judeo-Christian lens, Buber defines God as “him that, whatever else he may be in addition, enters into a direct relationship to us human beings through creative, revelatory, and redemptive acts, and thus makes it possible for us to enter into a direct relationship to him” (181).

While certainly not every god, especially the gods of fantasy works, are bound to this Judeo-Christian contextualization, there nonetheless exists a direct relationship between the gods and humanity in works of fantasy. This relationship, of course, is not always the idealized two-way street Buber presents. However, Buber’s theory nevertheless remains relevant. It provides a lens through which one can interpret the god-human interactions in works of fantasy, for indeed, it is through this relationship with the divine that humanity is defined. This may occur in

the more metaphorical sense that Buber likely intends—that humanity, through religious faith and contact with a moral divine, will come to a greater, richer understanding of itself as a whole. Yet, as gods are more readily accessible in fantasy literature, more prone to action, gods may define their mortal followers in a far more literal sense—physically, for example, as Herne in Clement-Davies’ *Fire Bringer* does, giving mortal deer their antlers. Gods also commonly define elements of culture or nuances of behavior, teaching mortals to value certain aspects of character. These types of definition often bleed together, for in providing the deer with antlers, Herne is also encouraging them to behave in certain ways, to “protect the herd” and challenge one another in the yearly rut.¹⁴ Camaraderie, courage, and competitiveness are all considered worthwhile elements of the version of humanity Herne presents. To define humanity, god-characters often intervene directly in the lives of mortals, guiding individuals or even shaping the values of entire cultures.

I have chosen to study works which contain gods as characters because it is far easier to perceive the relationship between a god and humanity when the existence of the god is not in doubt; it is much easier to see a relationship when both partners in that relationship are clearly real. Describing God in terms of the world of reality, Buber remarks that “the concept of personhood is, of course, utterly incapable of describing the nature of God; but it is permitted and necessary to say that God is *also* a person” (181).¹⁵ In works of fantasy, gods are characters. They are people acting in a relationship. Yet they are also on a different level than humanity, existing on a different plane. While often, especially in fantasy works, appearing very human, there is nevertheless something more-than-human about them—as impressed upon a reader by the very term “god.” A god is often, in fact, an “absolute person”—human, yet somehow more

¹⁴ David Clement-Davies, *Fire Bringer*, 1999 (New York: Firebird, 2002), 19. Hereafter cited in the text.

¹⁵ Again, God here is likely meant to be the Judeo-Christian God.

(Buber 181). Sometimes, they are the Aslans, the guides, presenting a version of humanity that, if followed, will lead human beings to a better, more fulfilled existence. Sometimes, however, they are the Hearteaters, as in *Tailchaser's Song*, negative gods, self-serving and greedy, interested in defining human beings as one thing only—slaves.

Just as the gods themselves vary from work to work, so too do the ways in which they act in their relationships with humans. Gods may take direct part in mortal affairs, guiding specific individuals down specific paths, as does the Goddess in Pierce's *The Song of the Lioness* quartet, helping groups of people to better understandings of humanity, as does Aslan in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, or interacting, disguised, with mortals, as does Firefoot in Williams' *Tailchaser's Song*. Gods may remove themselves like Nocturna in Oppel's *Silverwing* and *Sunwing*, waiting until the moment when belief and direst need coincide before acting. Gods may even remove themselves completely, content to watch the world unfold from a distance, as Ilúvatar is in Tolkien's *The Silmarillion*. Gods may be puppetmasters, steering human beings through the steps of prophecies as Herne does in Clement-Davies' *Fire Bringer*, or debauched despots, as they are in Zelazny's *Lord of Light*, or self-serving and unconcerned with humanity's plight, as is Om in Pratchett's *Small Gods*. Or they may simply behave as Anyanwu does in Butler's *Wild Seed*, walking among human beings as would-be humans themselves, trying to improve the lives of the people they love. The specifics of how each god defines humanity are unique to that individual god-character. However, after reading numerous works of fantasy, a reader may see a pattern emerge in regard to the ways particular types of gods define humanity. Even though gods are different characters, certain types of gods nevertheless define humanity through similar kinds of relationships. It is, as noted, these relationships between mortals and specific types of god that are the focus of this thesis.

These different relationships present different definitions of humanity not only to the mortal characters in given works, but to individual readers. Reading different works within the fantasy genre then enables one to see not only how humanity is defined within the vastly altered circumstances within the text, but to consider how one's own humanity is defined. Empathizing with a protagonist and his or her beliefs and actions, a reader may then feel heartened to see a version of humanity to which he or she relates validated—by gods, no less—in a text. Finding problematic actions supported by a god, however, a reader may initially grow frustrated, unable to fathom how a deity could include something so contradictory to a reader's beliefs in his or her definition of humanity. The Crooked God, a god of gambling and thieves from *The Song of the Lioness* quartet, may be one such deity, guiding his followers toward deception and subterfuge. Ideally, however, frustration could in turn lead a reader to greater contemplation as to when and how the version of humanity presented by a god might be appropriate, or why it should never be so. The fact that these different versions of humanity are defined and acted upon within a fantasy world, however, allows readers the distance to contemplate, and perhaps complicate or confirm, the elements of humanity they value and why. The fantasy setting, as Egoff would confirm, would allow a reader to be removed enough from the immediate reality of a world to consider different elements of humanity more objectively—yet would still have enough parallels to the world reality for a reader to empathize with the characters, to become emotionally invested in them and the gods who define them. Through the relationships between different types of gods and humans in fantasy works, a reader may then arrive at a fresh vision of humanity—whether it be through an emotional connection to the values defined by a particular god or a philosophical contemplation of the bond between the mortal and the divine, whether through the rejection of one god's definition or the approval of another.

Chapter One addresses the categorization of gods in greater depth, demonstrating how different types of gods influence human culture in different ways by tracing the evolution of the Judeo-Christian God in the Bible. This chapter also establishes the taxonomy of different god types that are then used to study the different relationships between gods and humanity. Chapters Two, Three, and Four, then, detail these different relationships, demonstrating how particular types of god define humanity through distinct roles. This then results in humanity being defined in different ways, with human beings having more or less agency in regard to their own definition.

Chapter One

Defining the Gods that Define Humanity:¹

The Categorization of Fantasy's Gods

The Great Mother Goddess of Tamora Pierce's *The Song of the Lioness* quartet is without a doubt a powerful deity. Though she does not use her great power to force her mortal followers to take specific actions, she does demonstrate her strength several times, through a series of impressive feats. The Goddess makes an ember, still burning, cool to the touch, transforming it into a powerful talisman that enables its wearer to see the workings of magic (*Hand* 14). As the mortal Alanna battles a group of desert demons that have plagued and terrorized the local tribesmen for generations, the Goddess infuses Alanna's sword with her power, enabling her to strike down the monsters (*Alanna* 204-206). Filling the mortal Alanna with her power, the Goddess is able to turn the Black God, the god of death, away from the kingdom of Tortall's ailing prince (*Alanna* 103). Not only that, but the Goddess is able to directly counter another god, Yahzed, by creating a downpour of rain to prevent his followers from burning a sorceress at the stake (*Woman* 217).

Om, in comparison, is a tortoise.

While the main god of Terry Pratchett's *Small Gods* was not always a tortoise, only becoming one after many of his mortal followers began believing in the structure of his church rather than him, he is nevertheless a different sort of deity than the Goddess, not only in character, but in type (177). While the Goddess's divine power does not stem from human belief, Om's does. The power that makes him a god, in the sense of a powerful entity able to define humanity, comes from the mortals. Om's godhood is, in a sense, created by human

¹ I would like to offer my thanks to Eric Rabkin for suggesting this title.

beings. However, both the Goddess and Om are different than, for example, Herne of David Clement-Davies' *Fire Bringer*. The Goddess and Om exist in worlds populated with multiple gods, the Goddess sharing heaven-space with deities ranging from the god Mithros, the divine protector, to the magic-hating Yahzed, to the gods of wolves and marmosets, and Om existing as one of the luckiest of the millions of small gods, for he has—or had—believers. In addition to these small gods, however, there are also thousands of gods who have believers and are able to exercise their authority to define humanity. These include not only “Blind Io the Thunder God” and the powerful and merciless goddess of the Sea, but also the less orthodox “Petulia, Goddess of Negotiable Affection... worshipped by ladies of the night,” and P’Tang-P’Tang, a “giant newt” worshipped by fifty-one isolated, marsh-dwelling people (Pratchett 142, 110, 128, 333). Herne, however, is the only god in the world of *Fire Bringer*. While gods who share their world with other deities may also share the role of defining humanity, single gods like Herne serve as the sole definers in their respective worlds.

These different types of gods—independent and created, existing in worlds with multiple deities or existing as the sole deity—define humanity in different ways. Robert Wright, in *The Evolution of God*, demonstrates elaborately that the Judeo-Christian God of the Old Testament changed and evolved with his people as circumstances required, transitioning from one of many gods to the one, true god.² If one type of god provided humanity with a viable definition, one which enabled all human beings to thrive in all circumstances, there would have been no need for God to evolve. The fact that God does evolve indicates that different types of gods are more suited to different types of humanity. Though the categories Wright creates are not necessarily applicable to fantasy literature—for, while the Bible may certainly be read as literature, it would

² This example does not in any way imply that the Bible, obviously central to the faith of so many people, is a work of fiction or fantasy. Rather, it demonstrates, through a well-known text, how gods of different types might differently influence humanity.

be deeply insulting to many to classify it as fantasy—Wright’s close analysis of the connection between types of gods and corresponding types of human existence does serve to provide some validation to the theory that gods of a certain kind define humanity in a certain way.

It is widely known that the god of the Old Testament created human beings in his likeness: He “created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them.”³ God, of course, does not only define the human body, but works to create, or at least influence, human culture. He shapes the actions of his chosen people by passing down laws—from the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai to the Book of Leviticus. It is through God that both the physical appearance of “human” and the social elements that govern human interaction are determined. God, as do gods in fantasy literature, serves the role of defining humanity. But God, for much of the Old Testament, was not quite God as many people in modern times understand him. Yahweh here does not possess “what many people would call a modern *moral* sensibility”—the deity “infinite in power and goodness,” simply did not exist throughout much of the Old Testament.⁴ As noted, the story presented in the Old Testament is one of “a god in evolution, a god whose character changes radically from beginning to end” (Wright 101). This is because Yahweh’s people, too, were evolving, and, as the people changed, so too did their relationship with the divine. Differing circumstances for the Hebrew people meant that a different type of god was needed to effectively define the fledgling nation. The polytheism that served the Hebrews well early in their history eventually gave way to what Wright calls monolatry and finally transformed into true monotheism.

³ *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, Eds. Bruce M. Metzger and Roland E. Murphy (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), Genesis 1.27. Hereafter cited in the text.

⁴ Robert Wright, *The Evolution of God* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2009), 100, 166. Hereafter cited in the text.

As early as the Biblical creation of human beings, there is evidence that God was not the sole god, but a member of the Hebrew pantheon, as he says, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness” (Genesis 1.26; Wright 105). Wright also points out several other uses of the first-person plural by God in Genesis. When, for example, Adam and Eve have eaten the forbidden fruit, God affirms that “man has become like one of us” (Genesis 3.22). In later books of the Bible, Wright also notes that God is presented as a member, or the head, of a “divine council” made up of other gods (105). The Old Testament, then, does not depict one god autocratically defining the humanity of his followers, but hints at the interplay of multiple gods in a time when humanity, or at least the Hebrews, perceived that Yahweh was not the only, or even the best, game in town.

Basing his argument on archaeological evidence, Wright asserts that the Hebrew people were actually an ethnic or regional group among the Canaanite people, and Yahweh, far from being an import from outside the Promised Land, was a relatively homegrown god (107). The coming together of Hebrews from the north and the south led, for a time, to the coexistence of the south’s warrior god Yahweh and the north’s paternalistic creator god El, who, as a compassionate militarist and patron of dreamers, shared many similarities with later incarnations of Yahweh (110-111). When cooperation was needed between these two peoples, their gods existed in harmony. Eventually, however, the two gods combined, with God telling Moses in the sixth chapter of Exodus that his name is officially Yahweh, not El. Wright describes this passage as explicating one of many “politically expedient theological fusions” in the ancient world, a melding of two religious traditions to ensure group cooperation by convincing the different peoples that “they actually worship the same god” (112). Wright then explains how Yahweh, originally incorporated as a lesser god in El’s court, supplanted El through the fortunes of their

original nations. Following “a shift in the relative power of northern and southern Israel,” Yahweh, the southern god, assumed a more prominent position in the local religious tradition (117). A more powerful group of people required a more powerful god to represent them.

As for the other gods of El’s pantheon, they “shrank in stature and eventually disappeared altogether,” with Yahweh the last man, or god, standing (Wright 124). This, however, was not monotheism, but monolatry, or “exclusive devotion to one god without denying the existence of others” (105). While polytheism exists as a form of worship when many different elements of humanity engage in cooperation or conflict as relative equals, monolatry enforces the supremacy of one god over others. Early teachings of the prophets do not “single [Yahweh] out for being the only god, just for being the best god for the Hebrews” (104). Even God’s own commandment, that there should be no other gods before him, indicates that God may be aware that he is not alone on the divine plane (Exodus 20.1; Wright 104). Monolatry, however, is presented as a reaction to and an outgrowth of several political and societal events. Increasing trade with other societies in the region produced a domestic, anti-internationalist spark, a need to defend the prominence of Yahweh against encroaching outsider gods (Wright 135). Also, domestic “supernatural pluralism was the enemy of royal power” (150). To create a more cohesive country, and to preserve his own power, a Hebrew king may have launched a campaign to label some domestic gods, remnants of El’s old pantheon, as foreign, using “fear of the foreign to purge the indigenous” (156). When the Hebrews required a more centralized authority upon which to securely base their growing power, God changed to reflect that cultural shift, becoming not one among equals, but the best of the gods.

When the Hebrews needed a supreme authority, a god who was not only the most powerful, but also unchallenged and unchallengeable, monolatry became monotheism. After the

destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem by the Babylonians, the Hebrews needed to explain how their most-powerful Yahweh had, apparently, been overcome by the forces of an invading army, an invading god. One of the most ironic and insidious ways to do this, according to Wright, would have been to claim that the entire Babylonian Exile was, in fact, God's will, Yahweh's punishment to a disloyal people. Yahweh, then, was behind the actions of Babylon—the Babylonian god was, in reality, his puppet, if he even existed at all, and was not just a sham believed in by foolish foreigners. As Yahweh claims the power to “govern history itself,” it is clear that he is not only the most powerful god, but the only God (Wright 171). If God could do this unopposed, then clearly no other god existed who could challenge him. This justification of the Hebrews' circumstances would “both explain their suffering and transmute it into good”—their move into foreign territory was actually spreading the faith in Yahweh as the one and only god (173). Also, if Yahweh was the one true god, other peoples would “be forced to acknowledge Israel's superiority on both a political and a theological plane” (173). Israel, an overshadowed, overburdened country, would be at the top of the deistic food chain, as it had backed the true god.

One might question why, faced with the trauma of the Exile, the Hebrews would not just declare their god dead and jump ship to worship a different regional god. The answer, according to Wright, is that, by this time, “divine identity, national identity, and ethnic identity were essentially inseparable” (170). God was not merely a useful political construct or a convenient explanation of natural, or unnatural, phenomena. Rather, his identity was directly linked to, and directly influenced, the identity of his human worshippers. The identity of God defines the identity of his human followers, and, as the identity of the Hebrew people changes, so, too, does the identity of God and the identity of his relationship to the mortals.

So “circumstances change, and God changes with them” (Wright 187). Obviously, as noted, the story of the Judeo-Christian God is rooted in history. It takes place, at least in part, in reality. Since belief in God within the realm of reality is frequently a matter of faith, this leads to a chicken-and-the-egg conundrum of who really influenced whom—did humanity influence the evolution of God, or did God’s own evolution as a character influence humanity? In the world of reality, it is likely that the former will be favored, that scholars may “see the divine, or at least ideas about the divine, reshaped by the mundane” (133).

But this is not necessarily the case in worlds of fantasy. In fact, the reverse may be true: The identity of the divine may reshape the mundane reality of humanity. When observed in a fantasy context, in which gods are verifiably real and visibly acting, different gods may fill different roles in order to define humanity in a different way. Instead of a nation in the process of being formed reshaping its god into the sole deity instead of one among many, a single god may exist in a work to indicate a universality of authority, a universal connection among humanity—even if humanity itself does not yet perceive it. Such is the case with Ilúvatar in Tolkien’s *The Silmarillion*, for he, by creating the Valar and coordinating their music, not only creates Middle-Earth, but determines how it will progress throughout the ages.⁵ Because he is the sole composer of the plan for the world, all forms of humanity are defined by him.⁶ Additionally instead of multiple gods being combined or created or castigated to further the ends of nations or prophets, multiple gods may exist as representations of a diversified human condition. This is clearly true in *The Song of the Lioness* quartet. While there is the odd scuffle

⁵ J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Silmarillion*, ed. Christopher Tolkien, 2nd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2001), 17. Hereafter cited in the text.

⁶ While some might argue that Melkor also defines humanity, Ilúvatar himself states that Melkor can only do so within the confines of Ilúvatar’s plan. So, while Melkor may be doing the dirty work, as it were, the true power of creation, which leads to the existence of all forms of humanity in the text, rests with Ilúvatar. This will be addressed in greater detail in Chapter Four.

between gods or their believers, the majority of the gods therein coexist in relative peace. And while there may not be a god or goddess specifically for ladies of night in this world, all mortals can find a god who presents a path of humanity they would be willing to follow, from the king of Tortall electing the path of the protector god Mithros to the lowly thief George Cooper choosing to follow the example of the cunning Crooked God.

Given the wide range of fantasy works and the vast diversity therein, describing how the works included here were chosen is of some importance. First and foremost, as noted in the introduction, each fantasy work includes at least one god who functions as a character. This excludes well-known fantasies such as Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* and the popular *Harry Potter* series by J.K. Rowling, which contain no gods at all. This also removes from consideration works in which gods function merely in a background capacity, as "decoration."⁷ In such works, gods nominally exist, but play no greater role than as exclamations or curses, or as factors complicating a fantasy culture to make it appear more three-dimensional, as seen by Alexander's references to a seemingly Judeo-Christian God in Mercedes Lackey's *The Fairy Godmother*. While there is certainly nothing wrong with this more referential presentation of gods, works which utilize it are of little use when gods are being considered as characters, able to enter into relationships with human beings. The works that are included, however, range from those marketed toward children to those marketed toward adults. This variety of selection was incorporated in part because gods as characters exist in fantasy works marketed to audiences of different ages. Indeed, Aslan, undoubtedly one of the better known god-characters discussed in this thesis, is found in a children's book. Additionally, works with different modal audiences,

⁷ Norman Beswick, "Glimpses of the Sacred: An Update on Religion in SF and F," *Foundation: The International Review of Science Fiction* 69.1 (1997): 68. Hereafter cited in the text.

works intended for audiences of different ages, tend to favor certain types of gods, indicating that different definitions of humanity may be presented to readers based on expected age.

Even with these criteria in place, I could not hope to read every fantasy work containing an active god-character. Turning to previous scholars who had worked at the genre-level of analysis, I adopted a methodology similar to that of Russian literary theorist Vladimir Propp. Interested in determining whether any sort of “innate order” existed in Russian folktales, Propp examined numerous works that fit his definition of a folktale.⁸ I, too, examined a number of works that fit my standards—works of fantasy literature which include gods as characters, acting in some relationship with humanity. Propp “studied hundreds of Russian folk-tales... and came to the conclusion that they all followed the same pattern” (Rivkin and Ryan 72). Again, as with Propp, the conclusions I reached regarding the different types of the gods and the different ways in which these types influence humanity were drawn after reading. While I cannot claim to have conducted my research with no preconceived notions as to the possible role of gods, I did not select works that fit neatly into categories I had previously designed. As Propp did not formulate his pattern until after reading multiple folktales, I did not devise my taxonomy until I had read a significant number of fantasy novels.

The first categorical division, one which was included in Wright’s analysis of the role of the Judeo-Christian God in relation to the Hebrew people, is that which exists between works containing multiple gods and works containing only one. The relationship that exists between gods and humans varies depending on the number of gods in a work. As will be addressed in later chapters, when multiple gods are present in a work, there is a likelihood that a specific god will be more concerned with a particular mortal or group of mortals rather than all mortals. The

⁸ Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan, *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, 2nd ed. (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 72. Hereafter cited in the text.

Goddess of *The Song of the Lioness*, for example, focuses much of her attention on the protagonist Alanna, and Anyanwu in Butler's *Wild Seed* dedicates much of her time and effort to the people living in her created community. If only a single god exists in a work, this deity is frequently less interested in individuals and more concerned with humanity as a whole within its fantasy world. Herne of *Fire Bringer*, for example, rarely interacts with any of his worshippers on an individual level, doing so only when it is required to fulfill part of his great Prophecy. As the Prophecy is enacted for the benefit of all mortals, it occupies more of Herne's attention than the actions of any particular mortal do (Clement-Davies 22). The terms used to describe these types of works will be "multideity" and "monodeity." Monodeity works, of course, are the works that contain only one god, while the term multideity was chosen to represent works with multiple gods because a term like "pantheon" simply is not specific enough. While the term "pantheon" was originally intended to include all gods, its most widely known connotation today refers to all gods within a specific cultural or religious grouping, e.g. the Greco-Roman pantheon. Additionally, some fantasy works, such as *Small Gods*, contain multiple pantheons. Referring to a work like this as a "pantheon" work would have been misleading, given the word's modern connotation—thus, multideity.

The second classification involves the distinction between independent versus created gods. This binary addresses whether or not gods would exist as such without the presence of human beings in their respective fantasy worlds. Independent gods, as the name would suggest, do exist without any dependence on the mortals in their worlds. Though they still take part in a relationship with human beings, their identity as gods would not be compromised without this relationship. Even if there existed no worshippers, no humans at all, independent gods would retain their superhuman powers. Aslan would still be Aslan, even if the Pevensie siblings had

never come to Narnia. He would still have had the capability to, for example, shatter the White Witch's winter without their presence or belief. Additionally, independent gods would continue to exist on a more-than-mortal plane even in the absence of humans. In Tad Williams' *Tailchaser's Song*, an entire mythology surrounds Firefoot and his god-brothers, describing their adventures with other gods before mortal cats even walked the earth.⁹ From this, it is readily inferred that, if mortal cats were to vanish, Firefoot and the other gods would continue to exist as gods, as they had before the mortals' arrival. While independent gods may be the creators of humankind, as is the case with Ilúvatar of *The Silmarillion*, Herne of *Fire Bringer*, and Nocturna of *Silverwing* and *Sunwing*, this is not universally true of independent gods.

Some gods, however, are clearly not creator, but created. Created gods are in some way brought into being by, or draw their godly power from, the people within their fantasy world. Humankind in some way creates the god which it then worships. Often, this creation takes place unconsciously, or, over time, humankind forgets the role that it played in creating its god. In Zelazny's *Lord of Light*, for example, the ersatz Hindu gods were originally mortals like any others.¹⁰ They, however, were able to maintain control of most of the technology in a new and unfriendly world. Access to this technology enables them not only to keep themselves alive, but to determine which mortals live and which die (Zelazny 56). As the gods remain alive through the centuries, new generations of mortals forget that the gods were never *actually* gods. While in some fantasy worlds, created gods may be able to maintain power independently of their creators, no longer relying on humans to keep their god status, this appears to be relatively rare.¹¹ More common are the gods who remain in a state of godhood only so long as they retain the

⁹ Tad Williams, *Tailchaser's Song*, 1985 (New York: DAW Books, Inc., 2002), xix-xxi. Hereafter cited in the text.

¹⁰ Roger Zelazny, *Lord of Light*. 1967 (New York: Eos, 2007), 58. Hereafter cited in the text.

¹¹ This was, at least, the case within the works I read, which admittedly comprised a very small sampling of a very vast genre.

belief of their human followers. For these created gods, to lose human faith is to be reduced to a state of, if not *normal* humanity as such, then at least equality with mortals. Much of Doro's power in *Wild Seed*, for example, stems from the fact that his followers view him as a god.¹²

Anyanwu, who has comparable supernatural abilities to Doro's, flirts with the notion of godhood, but ultimately chooses to identify herself with mortals rather than deities.

Discouraging the mortal characters from the belief that she is a goddess, by the end of the novel, she has instated herself as human instead of divine (Butler 297). Because her community no longer believes that she is a goddess, for them, she effectively ceases to be one. A case-in-point of belief creating godhood is found in the entire premise of *Small Gods*, in which the power of gods to act in beyond-mortal ways is determined exclusively by the belief mortals place in them. The more believers a god has, the more powerful a god becomes. However, when the believers dwindle, so too does the god, eventually reduced to nothing but "the echo of a lost god" drifting formless in the desert (Pratchett 246).

These two categorical binaries—multideity/monodeity and independent/created—are not mutually exclusive. The number of gods within a work in no way dictates whether said gods would be independent or created. In fact, the categories influence one another, so that, for example, a created multideity defines humanity through a different sort of relationship than an independent multideity. As these categories invite combination, works of fantasy in this thesis will be examined within the scope of four different types of god character: The independent multideity, the created multideity, the independent monodeity, and the created monodeity. Categorically dividing works in this way may seem counterintuitive to an argument that the majority of gods in fantasy works act as definers of humanity. However, as shown in part by

¹² Octavia Butler, *Wild Seed*, 1980 (New York: Warner Books, Inc., 2001), 49. Hereafter cited in the text.

Wright, different types of gods define humanity in different ways, through different relationships with mortals.

Independent multideities, for example, as seen in *The Song of the Lioness* quartet, *Tailchaser's Song*, *Silverwing*, and *Sunwing*, act in a parental role toward mortal children, teaching and guiding them so that they might live happier, more fulfilling lives. Readers who interpret human existence as balanced between human free will and the wills of the gods would likely find their views reflected here. Created multideities, however, may also be parental, but, as *Wild Seed*, *Lord of Light*, and *Small Gods* reveal, the mortal children in these works have grown up, and it is the task of one of the gods to act as a parent, encouraging the mortals to act to define themselves rather than relying solely on the gods. Proponents of free will, those who believe that human beings are entirely masters of their own fates, would find that, in these works, even some of the gods agree with them. Interestingly, independent monodeities, as in *The Silmarillion*, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, and *Fire Bringer*, are often the least parental. Their relationships with mortals are more those between god and worshipper, as they lack much of the special interest in particular mortals that makes multideities so like parents. Those readers who believe in divine fate, in a god's plan for all of humanity, here have an opportunity to see such a plan carried out. Finally, the category of created monodeity stands all but empty, containing only a segment of *Jurgen, A Comedy of Justice* by James Branch Cabell.¹³ The different relationships between gods and mortals in these four categories reveal the different ways gods of different types define humanity in their respective fantasy works.

Considering the gods in these categories, it is likely that none would have the impact on a reader that God in the Old Testament does. The presence of gods in fantasy literature simply does not hold the same meaning, for gods in fantasy literature are not rooted in the history of

¹³ A hypothesis as to why created monodeities are so rare will be included in Chapter Four.

reality. Much of the Judeo-Christian God's significance to a reader, even a non-believer, stems from the fact that many real people have, for generations, defined themselves by his teachings. The significance of gods in fantasy literature cannot come from the influence those gods have exerted in the world of reality. Rather, their significance comes from the influence they have on, and for, an individual reader. Seeing his or her own beliefs reflected in the teachings of a particular god, a reader may feel that they are being legitimized. The fact that an author has not only chosen to include one's beliefs, but to have them validated through the mouth of a god, likely reassures a reader as to the value of those beliefs, of his or her opinions regarding what truly defines a person. When presented with negative gods, readers may also approve of seeing disliked behaviors and beliefs rejected and removed from the definition of humanity. In different definitions of humanity, different readers may see behaviors they detest rejected, beliefs they hold dear affirmed, all by an individual character—but a character who is also a god. The character is not mortal, not human like the reader. Rather, he or she, by virtue of the title "god," may well wield beyond-human authority. While a reader undoubtedly understands that this god is not a god in the world of reality, seeing his or her beliefs presented in a fantasy world as part of that whole world's divine definition of what it means to be human is an appealing affirmation for a reader, a validation of what he or she believes.

It is possible for the process of classification and categorization to be taken even farther, of course. It would undoubtedly be interesting to study how capricious tricksters define humanity versus how benevolent earth mothers do so, whether wrathful avengers serve to clarify humanity differently than apathetic clockmakers. This, however, would be the work of years, or decades, and would invoke a veritable rat's nest of cross-categorization and awkward amalgamations. Also, this runs the risk of focusing on how an individual god defines humanity. While this

would not be a poor choice for analysis in and of itself, it would be counterproductive when one aims to examine patterns regarding the defining relationships between different types of gods and humans in fantasy works. Classification in terms of broader categories offers a much more universal scope and a greater relevance to a larger number of novels, and, as my interest revolved around the different roles gods play within the genre and what might be gleaned from examination of those roles, it seemed necessary to sacrifice greater specificity for broader scope.

Even this very general level of categorization is imperfect, however. Just as the world of reality rarely allows for simple categorization, neither do worlds of fantasy. There will always be works that slip through the cracks, that do not seem to fit well within any category. One example, which might reflect an untapped sampling of gods in fantasy work, would be Erin Hunter's *The Warriors* series. The mortal cats in these books practice a form of ancestor worship, sending their prayers to the souls of the departed in StarClan. These ancestors function as gods in the sense that they act in a relationship which defines the lives of mortals, and in many ways they appear to be independent of mortals. However, without their descendants, it is unclear whether they would still be gods, for descendants are a necessary component of ancestor worship. In this way, they might be regarded as created. A similar problem arises in *The Night Life of the Gods* by Thorne Smith. The gods in this text are created by humans, in the sense that they began their existence as sculptures. However, these sculptures are representations of the Greek gods, believed, in their time, to be real. As it is not entirely clear whether these sculptures have been imbued with the spirit of the once-real Greek gods or whether they are merely human creations come to life, it is not clear whether or not they would be independent or created gods.

It would likely be all but impossible to find a method of categorization applicable to all works of fantasy containing god-characters. It may, however, be possible to find a meaningful

pattern in the different ways that types of god-characters enter into relationships with mortals, and the different ways these god-characters define the humanity of the mortals who share their fantasy worlds. Considering these different relationships, these different definitions, may lead readers to find some of Egoff's fresh vision. While a reader may not necessarily look at his or her religious faith in a new way, he or she might find other philosophical considerations complicated by such reading—whether or not mortals have any ability to choose their own gods, their own faiths, and thus, their own definitions; whether or not belief in a god actually matters on both sides of the relationship; and whether authors, in choosing different types of gods, are presenting a definition of humanity governed by free will or fate.

Chapter Two

*Parent-gods and Mortal Children:
The Independent Multideities*

Those familiar with the mythologies of ancient cultures, or cultures with their roots in ancient times, will readily observe that monotheism was not the cultural norm for a significant span of human existence. The Aztecs of Mesoamerica, the Aryans of the Indus Valley, the ancient Greeks, and the ancient Egyptians all worshipped expansive pantheons of gods.¹ Wright, too, notes that polytheism, or even monolatry, existed in the Middle East long before the belief in one god alone became prevalent (99-100). While fantasy, of course, does not need to reflect all facets of reality, it nonetheless makes a certain poetic sense to begin the examination of gods in fantasy works with those gods that mirror what is presumably the world of reality's oldest belief system.²

Multideity works are not, as noted, necessarily pantheon works. Rather, they are works in which there are at least two gods or goddesses—and often many more—of comparatively equal power. In independent multideity works, the existence of these multiple gods is by no means determined by the humans within the fantasy world. Whether mortals were present or not, the gods would exist. The gods' power, too, is their own—though some element of belief is often required on the part of humans for the gods to exercise these powers to the fullest extent in the lives of mortals. The implication here, however, is not that the gods would be unable to act on their own, but rather, they prefer not to intervene without human request.

¹ Robert J. Wenke and Deborah Olszewski, *Patterns in Prehistory: Humankind's First Three Million Years*, 5th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 289-290. Hereafter cited in the text.

² By this, I mean the oldest belief system that includes belief in a god as such. Prehistoric sites with no written record are sometimes archaeologically interpreted as containing evidence of ancestor veneration or belief in spirits. Much of this is merely conjecture. Regardless, there is little archaeological dispute that polytheism predates monotheism in most of the world's independently arising civilizations.

A god's intervention, of course, varies to some extent by individual work, because the gods themselves are individual characters, and as such, interact with the mortals of their respective works in different ways. For example, in Tamora Pierce's young adult quartet *The Song of the Lioness*, which follows the life of a young woman trying to become a knight in a medieval, patriarchal society, the Great Mother Goddess is actively involved in the life of protagonist Alanna, often appearing to her and conversing with her directly (*Hand* 6-15; *Lioness* 18, 247). Nocturna, however, the northern bat-goddess in Kenneth Oppel's children's novel *Silverwing* and its sequel, *Sunwing*, is far more distant, a veritable poster-deity for "god works in mysterious ways." The protagonist Shade, a runty young bat struggling both to reunite with his family and prove that doing great deeds does not require great size, is one of the few mortals in these works to question not only the intentions, but the existence, of the god. Nocturna appears to intervene directly only twice within the works—though she is frequently referred to by the mortal characters, and there is certainly some question as to how much she has actually been dipping her wings into mortal affairs (*Silver* 27-31; *Sun* 245). And Firefoot, one of the cat-gods of Tad Williams's young adult novel *Tailchaser's Song*, is somewhere in between, wandering, disguised, in and out of the mortal Tailchaser's quest to find a lost loved one, and only acting in his role as god at the novel's conclusion, when he is most needed (Williams 72, 315-316).

These god-characters are not only different in comparison to the gods of other works and other worlds, but in comparison to gods that exist within their own fantasy worlds. The Great Mother Goddess of *The Song of the Lioness* is a distinct character compared to Mithros, to the Black God, to the Crooked God, and to the myriad of other deities that populate Pierce's world of Tortall and its neighboring countries. Firefoot of *Tailchaser's Song* is distinct not only from his two feline-god brothers, but from the gods of foxes, of crows, of frogs. In *Silverwing* and

Sunwing, Nocturna is in fact diametrically opposed to her twin brother-god Cama Zotz, with the two deities being characterized as radically different despite Nocturna's few appearances. In a reader's eyes, the different gods are clearly separate characters, often valuing and presenting different, though not necessarily opposing, actions, attributes, and emotional states. As noted in the introduction, by identifying a character as a god, an author grants that character the potentiality of authority. This gives god-characters the ability, the status, to define the mortals within a work. The existence of multiple gods, each one unique, indicates the diverse and varied nature of humanity. In independent multideity works, there is no one answer to the question of what it means to be human. Rather, each god represents different facets of and possibilities for humanity. Following the example of a particular god means a human character will be defined in a particular way, for different gods define their mortal affiliates in different ways.

All of these different gods in an independent multideity work are relative equals, in that no characters identified as gods are not actually gods.³ Like human characters, god-characters in multideity works may have strengths or weaknesses, may have different levels of power in different situations. Despite this, the gods remain unshakably on a level distinct from, and above, the human characters of their world. Within their fantasy works, the independent multideities represent adults, serving as authorities which define the mortals, the children. While it is not uncommon for a god to fill the role of villain within a fantasy world, often within a multideity work there are multiple good gods as well. That these multiple options for humanity be presented positively to the reader is important because oftentimes, simply for the sake of effective storytelling, the numerous good gods within a work cannot be afforded equal page-time

³ It is far more common in independent monodeity works for another entity, either a supernatural one or a mortal one, to falsely claim equality with the god. These individuals, however, are almost always the villains of their particular works, and are always proven to be inferior to the god in some way. This will be discussed to a greater extent in Chapter Four.

or equal development. Firefoot, for example, receives a great deal of attention within *Tailchaser's Song*, as do his feline-god brothers Whitewind and Hearteater. The gods of foxes and frogs, however, while likely no less complex than the cat-gods within the fantasy world, exist within the fantasy text only as references (Williams 62, 347). Indeed, it is often the case that a core god or small group of gods serves as the main god-characters in a work; thus, only a few divine representations of humanity are explored in any detail. The fact that other gods exist, however, acknowledges that other valid options for humanity exist as well. They are simply not being expounded upon within this particular text.

The gods that do stand as the main god-characters within a text, however, fill a very particular role. In these works, there is often one god that better relates to a particular mortal—generally the protagonist—or group of mortals than other gods do. The sort of humanity toward which this mortal is inclined, the values he or she holds as important, leads him or her to worship a particular god, the god who would guide mortals toward that particular definition of humanity. A mortal affiliates with one of the many gods because that god presents a version of humanity to which the mortal can relate. Through this affiliation, the mortal enters a relationship with the god through which that mortal's humanity is affirmed and further defined. This relationship truly characterizes the category of independent multideity, for it is the relationship in which one god among the many divine adults of a fantasy world acts as a parent to a particular mortal child or group of children.

The terms “parent” and “child” are not used here in a biological sense, but metaphorically. A parent-god takes a specific interest in a particular mortal child, just as a parent would take greater interest in one's own child as compared to other children. A parent-god, too, would have no interest in subjugating one's mortal child, but rather guiding that child to make independent

decisions, decisions that would hopefully lead the child to be a successful reflection of the god's teachings, the god's definition of humanity. Yet despite the parent-god's encouragement toward independent action, he or she remains ready to intervene if a situation that a mortal child alone simply could not resolve should develop. In this respect, a god is very like the parent of a young child. Just as a parent ideally tries to guide a child toward independent action, but remains ready to lend a guiding hand if a child cannot cope with a given situation, so, too, does the parent-god. It is also important to note that the parent-child relationship of god and mortal, serving as a metaphorical dichotomy in these works, is static. There is rarely, if ever, any sense of apotheoses—a mortal child will not grow up and become a god.⁴ That is not to say that a mortal character is not able to grow and change, not able to become a person better able to act independently following a parent-god's guidance. It does mean, however, that the mortal child in an independent multideity work will never outgrow the parent-god. The god will always act as a defining force in the mortal child's life.⁵ The parental relationship between god and mortal is less biological and physical, and more perceptual. The mortal character continues to perceive the god as a younger child would perceive a parent, and continues to require guidance, to seek and to accept the god as a divine definer of his or her humanity.

Before delving into specific examples of how the gods in independent multideity works act as parents, however, it is necessary to consider the element of choice in this parent-child relationship—for it is quite clear that a child cannot choose his or her parent. Yet in these independent multideity works, it is definitely suggested, though with varying levels of

⁴ While there may be fantasy works in which mortals do indisputably become gods, none appeared in the sample works studied. It is then reasonable to infer that, if they do exist, they are rarer than works which contain a static parent-child relationship and might even fall into a different category, such as that of created multideity works.

⁵ At least, *a* god will. The element of choice, which will be addressed presently, is key in independent multideity works. That being said, it is rare that a mortal protagonist will swap gods midstream, as it were. Generally, once the initial choice has been made, the mortal in an independent multideity work will continue to affiliate with the same god and be defined by that parent-god.

explicitness, that mortal characters can choose among the various gods. The mortals, understandably, choose to affiliate with the god that presents and teaches a type of humanity most suited to their particular characters. Alanna, for example, in *The Song of the Lioness* quartet, affiliates with the Great Mother Goddess, a female deity whose character includes elements of both warrior and woman. The Goddess's temple is guarded by female warriors "dressed in armor" and "armed with great double-headed axes," yet the Goddess is also linked with love and fertility, invoked on the holiday of Beltane to grant good fortune to couples and offer "her blessing on the summer crops" (*Alanna* 19; *Lioness* 247). The protagonist Alanna constantly struggles with her identity as both a female and a fighter, trying to find a balance between the two. As the Goddess presents a picture of humanity in which it is possible for a woman to be both feminine and fearsome, it makes complete sense to the reader, and to Alanna, for Alanna to affiliate herself with the Goddess. It would make far less sense, however, for Alanna's friends Raoul and George to do so. This is not because they are male, for some of the Goddess's followers are indeed men (*Hand* 146). Rather, it is because their characters mesh more closely with the definitions of humanity presented by other gods, and so they have chosen instead to affiliate with these other deities. Raoul, a brawny, good-natured young man, wants only to be a good and chivalrous knight. As such, he is understandably more drawn to Mithros, "the shining warrior" god referred to as "the divine protector" (*Lioness* 208, 248). On the other hand, George, a charming young thief, is more interested in cunning, quick wits, and quicker knives. The version of humanity he models himself after is that presented by the Crooked God, the god of gamblers and thieves (*Lioness* 192). The choices that the mortal characters have made are certainly the most logical for them—they have chosen to affiliate with gods who teach a version of humanity that will help the mortal characters attain their goals, help them become the

people that they want to be. However, there is no indication within the quartet that any of the mortals are locked into their choice of god. If, for example, Alanna had changed ambitions, opting instead to become a thief, the Crooked God would likely have been more than willing to accept her into the fold. And Mithros, the divine example to all protectors, not only male ones, would undoubtedly not have rejected her as an affiliate merely on the basis of her womanhood. However, Alanna, aiming to find a balance between seemingly disparate elements of her character, seeks out a parent-god who personifies that balance.

The choices are relatively simple for the characters in Alanna's world of Tortall—for the most part, they are made early in the quartet, and the characters find no reason to change them. However, the option of not only choosing, but switching, gods is intimated to be a viable one in both *Tailchaser's Song*, and *Silverwing* and *Sunwing*. In the former, Tailchaser, a young tomcat questing to find a lost love, finds himself drawn to the example of the feline-god Firefoot, who “walked alone” and was “as clever as time” (Williams xix-xx). In the course of his quest, Tailchaser encounters Hearteater, one of Firefoot's brother-gods. It is clear to both the reader and to Tailchaser that Hearteater is an evil entity, presenting such a warped and twisted definition of humanity that no sane mortal, either reader or character, would want to follow his example.⁶ Tailchaser, however, in order to rescue some of his friends, must infiltrate Hearteater's stronghold. He does so by convincing two of Hearteater's misshapen followers that he, too, is an affiliate of Hearteater's (280). His success, in spite of his appearance, and in spite of his voice, which sounds unusually high to Hearteater's followers, intimates subtly that Tailchaser would not be dismissed on principle from joining Hearteater's ranks (280). That he is

⁶ The role of evil gods, as well as the quality that seems to designate a god as “evil,” will be addressed later in this chapter.

able to do so—even though the action is a deception—indicates that switching allegiance from Firefoot to Hearteater could be possible.

The clearest example of the ability to switch between gods, however, appears in *Silverwing*. The young protagonist Shade, a small northern bat, is trapped into flying southward with two dangerous, cannibalistic vampire bats—affiliates of the god Cama Zotz. Desperate to escape the cannibals, Shade attempts to trick them, telling them that he wants “to be with the bats who are powerful and who worship Zotz,” forsaking the worship of Nocturna because she is “powerless” and renders her affiliates so as well, making them “spend [their] lives afraid of everything” (*Silver* 188). Rather than dismissing Shade’s request as foolish or impossible, the cannibal bat Goth, a primary disciple of Zotz often in direct communication with the god, agrees to let Shade convert (190). Goth asserts that if Shade were to eat bat meat, to follow the cannibalistic teachings of Zotz, Shade would grow until, far from being a runt, he would become a vampire bat himself. When the cannibals kill another bat, Goth orders his companion to give Shade a bite, as Shade is “a convert of Zotz” and so should act in accordance with Zotz’s teachings (192). Though Shade, like Tailchaser, has no true desire to switch affiliation to another god, the fact that Goth is willing to let him do so is a clear indication that such a conversion is possible. Even more disturbing is Goth’s belief that Shade may change physically as an affiliate of Zotz, indicating that the god may not only dictate the actions of his followers, but shape their bodies as well, defining them in multiple senses of the word.

Clearly, in independent multideity works, even if switching between gods is not common practice, it is possible. Mortals can choose a different version of humanity for themselves by selecting a different god to define them. It might appear, then, that choosing a god is more like choosing to live with a particular aunt or uncle, or choosing a mentor figure. Indeed, in his work

with science fiction novels, Eric Rabkin has noted that oftentimes a character dissatisfied with what a parent allows him or her to do will leave that parent and find a different individual to fill the parent role.⁷ However, even though this new individual is not biologically a parent, they are nevertheless offering guidance to the main character as a parent would. The parent role remains. Similarly, in independent multideity works, once a choice—or perhaps a switch—has been made, the relationship between the mortal and the god seems far closer than one between a child and an aunt, uncle, or mentor would be. The role here is still the role of parent.

Additionally, while children cannot choose a parent biologically, children are able to choose how much faith to have in a parent as a parent—as the adult with special interest in them, the adult who will guide them toward making their own decisions, the adult who would intervene in the event that a situation arose that would be too challenging for children alone to handle. The element of choice, be it in science fiction novels or in independent multideity fantasy works, does not reflect choosing a parent in the biological sense, but in the social, symbolic one. A mortal choosing to believe in a god is not believing in the god in the sense of existence, for the gods are clearly seen by both the mortal characters and the readers to exist. Rather, the mortal character believes in a god as a child would believe in a parent, trusting in this particular god to protect, teach, guide, and ultimately define him or her in a way he or she wants to be defined.

For a child, one aspect that separates a parent from life's other adults is the fact that the parent takes a special interest in that child and its development. Similarly, one of the ways in which a parent-god is distinguished from the other gods, the other adults, of a work is through the special interest that god takes in the definition of a particular mortal character or group of characters. The Great Mother Goddess of *The Song of the Lioness* quartet is an excellent example. Several times, she appears in person to provide advice to her affiliate Alanna, a

⁷ From a conversation with Professor Eric Rabkin, 16 February, 2011.

protagonist trying to balance her identity as a female with her desire to become a knight (*Hand* 6-15; *Lioness* 18-19, 248-249). When Alanna is fearful of the Ordeal, the final step toward knighthood, the Goddess counsels her, informing her that “the Chamber [of the Ordeal] is only a room, though a magical one, and you will enter it when the time comes” (*Hand* 14). She encourages Alanna in her quest for knighthood by affirming that she should not balk at this final test. However, she also works to instruct Alanna that being a knight does not mean sacrificing her identity as a woman. For much of the quartet, Alanna is adamant that she does not “want to fall in love” with a man, but would rather remain “a warrior maiden and go on adventures” (*Hand* 11). The Goddess, however, is equally adamant in encouraging Alanna to “learn to love,” believing “love will ease” much of the hardship on the path Alanna has chosen to walk (*Hand* 14-15). She tries to convey to her affiliate that Alanna need not be ashamed of her womanhood, need not choose between being a woman and being a knight, but can be both. The Goddess also presents Alanna with special gifts, including an “ember [that] seemed to burn within a crystal shell” that enables Alanna to see magic being worked, and a feisty feline guide to provide Alanna with advice when the Goddess cannot appear herself (*Hand* 14, 15). Wise and well-regarded characters within the quartet also observe the connection that exists between Alanna and the Goddess, noting that Alanna is one who is “favored of the gods” and that “the Goddess has Her hand on [her]” (*Woman* 42; *Alanna* 141). No other gods within the quartet have such a marked interest in Alanna. They do not speak to her, or offer advice or objects to assist her. They exist as other adults would—perhaps aware of the existence of a child, but having no reason to give her any particular regard. She is not their child. Her affiliation is with a different god, a type of humanity different from that which they provide to mortals.

In *Tailchaser's Song*, Firefoot also takes a particular interest in the protagonist Tailchaser. As Tailchaser travels toward the feline court of Firsthome, searching for signs of his missing love, Firefoot chooses to travel with him in the guise of a mad old cat named Eatbugs (Williams 72). Through the course of their travels, Firefoot/Eatbugs tells Tailchaser tales to broaden his understanding of the world, for Tailchaser, being young, had never before left the relative safety of his home. The tales, too, have a magical cast about them, unlike the tales of mortal cats, for as the god tells them, Tailchaser finds that he can “see the events in a way he had never been able to at the Meeting Wall” at home (75). Not only does this suggest to a reader early on that Eatbugs is more than he seems, but it also indicates that the gods in this text are able to encourage their mortal affiliates to see the world in a clearer way, a way that would not be possible without the deities' intervention. Firefoot, too, also tries to protect Tailchaser from harm, warning him before Hearteater's fierce Clawguard attack (192). Many other cats from Firsthome and its surrounding area had previously been captured, and there is no indication that Firefoot attempted to defend them as he does Tailchaser. He did not travel with and teach them. His parental focus is on the mortal child who affiliates with him. And unlike Firefoot, Whitewind and Hearteater, the two other main gods in *Tailchaser's Song*, express no particular interest in Tailchaser. Whitewind, while often referred to within the text, is only seen in passing and has no regard for Tailchaser one way or another. Hearteater, while briefly acknowledging that there are “hints” of noteworthy power in Tailchaser's spirit, regards the mortal cat as nothing of consequence, “less than a pebble” (216, 301). Hearteater treats Tailchaser no differently than any of the other cat prisoners he takes, not even expressing a negative interest in the mortal by subjecting him to unique torture.

Much as in *The Song of the Lioness*, the main focus of *Tailchaser's Song* is on the protagonist, and thus on his personal relationship with the god he chooses to affiliate with. However, more so than in *The Song of the Lioness*, *Tailchaser's Song* also briefly touches upon the idea of certain groups affiliating with a certain god, based on the path of humanity they wish to follow. The First-walkers, for example, adhere to the type of humanity presented by Firefoot. Openly calling themselves “followers of Tangaloor Firefoot,” these cats descend from a “pure line of those Folk who ran with [their] own Lord Firefoot” in olden days, and are “sworn to a paw-and-heart oath to guard that heritage” and follow in the example set forth by the god (88). The cats of Firsthome, however, affiliate more with Whitewind, Firefoot’s brother, referred to in legend as the first king of cats, who favored the hierarchy and cooperation of court rather than a lifestyle of solitary roaming (133). And the Clawguard, a group of cats molded body and soul to reflect Hearteater’s version of humanity, obviously affiliate with him.

The idea of special parental interest in a group rather than an individual is seen most clearly in *Silverwing* and *Sunwing*. Nocturna, who, as noted, is one of the most distant of the gods in the independent multideity works, is rarely seen taking any direct, special interest in the protagonist Shade. She does not appear to speak with him as the Goddess does with Alanna, nor does she travel with him, even in disguise, as Firefoot does with Tailchaser. Admittedly, several of the other characters believe that Nocturna has, in fact, been assisting Shade, but has been doing so behind the scenes, tweaking events just enough to enable him to survive (*Sun* 187). Even Shade’s own mother, depicted to readers as reliable and intelligent, and a respected elder by the conclusion of *Sunwing*, intimates that both Shade’s continued survival and the fact that the family has been reunited against all odds, while appearing to be “just luck,” are actually “Nocturna’s doing” (*Sun* 204).

While the extent of Nocturna's special interest in Shade is thus left to a reader's own opinion, Nocturna's special interest in northern bats in general is not in question. She is parent to this entire group of affiliates. In an echo flashback at the beginning of *Silverwing*, Nocturna appears to the bats and speaks to them directly (*Silver* 31). This encounter follows the legendary Great Battle of the Birds and the Beasts, in which the bats did not take sides. Because of their neutrality, however, both birds and beasts turned on them and forbade them from flying in the daylight, under pain of death (*Silver* 29). Nocturna, angry with the other animals, but unable to undo what they have done, gives the bats special gifts—darkened fur “to blend in with the night” and “echo vision” with which “to hunt in the dark” (*Silver* 29).⁸ Appearing to the bats as a force of nature, with her open eye eclipsing the sun, she promises them that, one day, their “banishment will end” and they “will be free to return to the light of day once again” (*Silver* 31). Nocturna's Promise is for the northern bats alone. She defines both their bodies and their belief system, assuring them that she does indeed have a special interest in them.

Parenting, of course, is not all about the special interest a parent takes in a child, and parent-gods in independent multideity works are not characterized solely by the special interest they take in certain mortal children. Once a child leaves infancy, it no longer relies entirely on its parent, but is capable of independent action. Ideally, parents would encourage independent action in a child, at least to some extent—brushing one's own teeth, getting oneself dressed, cleaning one's own room. Because many of the mortal children in the fantasy texts are actually adults themselves—in a literal, rather than symbolic, sense—the independent actions toward

⁸ Also, it is worth noting that the text states that Nocturna “could not” undo what had been done. This could raise interesting questions about just how much power a god can actually exercise in the lives of mortals. Based on how Nocturna is described and characterized in the text, however, it seems likely that she *could* have undone the banishment, in the sense that she would be physically capable of doing so. However, because Nocturna is presented as a positive, parental deity, her role is to guide and define, not demand. Compelling and ordering mortals to take certain actions are not traits associated with positive, parental deities, only with negative ones, generally the villains of a work. More on positive and negative deities, and how their roles differ, will be addressed at the end of the chapter.

which the parent-gods encourage them are far more expansive than household chores. However, the basic premise is the same. The guidance parents provide is in the interest of guiding children so that they can be successful in their ventures even when the parents are not able to hold their hands every step of the way. Similarly, the gods present an example, a version of humanity, then encourage their mortal affiliates to use that example as a jumping-off point for independent action. The gods do not give the mortals all the answers. Rather, as a good parent would, they provide their mortal children with enough information and enough skills that they can make some of their own decisions, achieve some of their own successes. The parent-gods encourage some of this independent action in their mortal children.

The Goddess, for example, after providing Alanna with advice, does not actively compel her to follow that advice. After the conversation in which she tells Alanna not to fear the Ordeal of Knighthood or falling in love, she does not hound Alanna, does not immediately force her to face her fears or steer her into a romance. Rather, she lets life go on, lets Alanna see the validity of her advice in regard to the path of humanity Alanna has chosen to follow (*Hand* 141-142, 185). Indeed, while the Goddess provides Alanna with advice and guidance throughout *The Song of the Lioness* quartet, she also states bluntly, “I do not plan mortals’ lives for them, Alanna. *You* must do that for yourself” (*Lioness* 18). According to the Goddess, gods in this fantasy world must ensure that mortals have the ability to choose, must have some stake in their own fate, in how they become the type of person they want to be (*Lioness* 248). Like a parent, “a god can guide a mortal, nurture, teach. And yet there comes a moment when the god must stand away” allow his or her mortal child to take independent action (*Lioness* 249). Far from compelling Alanna to act in a certain way, the Goddess presents her with a version of humanity upon which to model herself. After offering Alanna this guidance, however, the Goddess allows

Alanna to exercise her own volition. Alanna, then, takes independent action because she wants to follow the guidance of the Goddess, her parent-god, because she perceives the validity of the version of humanity the Goddess teaches.

Firefoot of *Tailchaser's Song* incorporates a level of independence into the very version of humanity he defines for his affiliates. From his teachings, especially in relation to the First-walkers, it is evident that Firefoot encourages self-sufficiency in his affiliates.⁹ The First-walkers believe that it is “against the will of [their] lord Tangaloor Firefoot for the Folk to live always in such close proximity to one another” at the feline court of Firsthome (Williams 99). Following the dictates of the court would mean having less opportunity for independent action, less ability to choose one’s own path. Another issue for the cats throughout the novel is that many of them are forsaking a life in the wild for a life with humans. The First-walkers, however, “by the word of [their] Lord Firefoot, never will walk in the shadow of M’an” (175). A cat allowing itself to be kept by M’an would be willingly sacrificing its own independence for a life of subservience—a fate not only against the teachings of Firefoot, but likely against the aspirations of all parent-gods hoping to make their mortal children successful and independent. Firefoot also coaches Tailchaser to follow his own path. When Tailchaser hesitates to continue his quest, not wanting to leave his recovering friends alone at Firsthome, Firefoot informs him that “our Folk do not let love bind them that way” for “the strong meet in strength” (337). Tailchaser’s friends should be able to sustain themselves without him, and Tailchaser is encouraged to set out on his own, to finish the quest that he decided to undertake. Firefoot, however, gives Tailchaser just enough guidance for him to continue his quest with some chance of success. He provides Tailchaser with hints as to where to search, but takes no action to

⁹ In moderation. Firefoot does not seem to be encouraging mortals to be so self-sufficient as to remove the gods from their lives or to sever all connections with other mortals. Mortals should not be self-sufficient to the point that it would actually be detrimental to them, to the point where they would spurn any cooperation or assistance.

compel him to follow the instructions (342). Just as the Goddess gives Alanna advice and then leaves it to her to follow it, so too does Firefoot. While he doubtless wants his mortal affiliate Tailchaser to succeed in his quest, he provides just enough guidance for the mortal cat to do so independently.

As for *Silverwing* and *Sunwing*, arguably, Nocturna allows too much independent action, remaining too distant from the mortals and not providing them with that first spark to motivate independent action. That spark is advice or guidance, that which provides a mortal with the knowledge necessary to act independently. Nocturna, however, *has* offered something—only long before Shade or the other mortal characters were born. This is Nocturna’s Promise to undo their banishment. By instilling in bats the belief that one day they would be restored to the light of day, she tacitly encourages them to act independently to bring that Promise to fruition. Fifteen years before the events in *Silverwing* and *Sunwing*, for example, a group of bats “fought in... rebellion against the owls,” the primary enforcers of the banishment (*Sun* 118). The bats’ motivation was simply that they “wanted the sun back” (*Sun* 255). Frieda Silverwing, Shade’s mentor and a general in the rebellion, informs Shade that she had fought because she wanted to fulfill the Promise (*Sun* 258). Shade’s actions, which eventually do fulfill the Promise, were also undertaken because he wanted to win back the sun for the bats. Had Nocturna not given the bats the Promise, however, they would have had no rallying point, perhaps no belief that they even deserved to return to the daylight. They may not have acted at all. Nocturna, by giving the bats the Promise, offered them the first step along a path of independent action.

Despite the fact that these gods actively promote independent action in their mortal affiliates, they still remain in their roles as parents. For while parents do indeed encourage their children to act independently on some occasions, situations nevertheless arise that a child simply

cannot handle on his or her own. In these instances, rather than allowing a child to struggle through a problem beyond his or her ability to solve, the parent steps in to help, solving the problem himself or herself. In each of the independent multideity texts, such a situation arises, with a mortal child needing a parent-god to intervene on his or her behalf.¹⁰ The fact that the mortals do need the gods' help further reinforces the roles of child and parent. Mortal children in independent multideity texts remain children, for they do not grow past the stage where they might conceivably require a parent-god's assistance.

Despite the fact that Alanna grows in power and skill throughout *The Song of the Lioness* quartet, she asks for the Goddess's direct intervention several times. The first instance is in the first book, when the kingdom's prince is struck with a terrible Sweating Sickness. Alanna, unable to fight the disease even with her own magic, calls upon the Goddess for help. Filled "with raw magic" like fire, Alanna then hears "a woman's voice, speaking from eternities away," and the Goddess gives her mortal child the power to draw the prince back from death (*Alanna* 101-103). Most of the other times Alanna calls upon the Goddess for help also involve circumstances in which Alanna faces a foe that is beyond human. Encountering a group of desert demons, Alanna asks the Goddess to show her how to defeat them (*Alanna* 204-205). The Goddess does, answering Alanna's prayer by helping her wield a magical sword (206). When a wayward apprentice attacks her with a cursed crystal sword of incredible power, Alanna sends "a plea to the Goddess" for strength and receives a wealth of divine magic, which she uses to defend herself and the village under her protection (*Woman* 106-107). Trying to save a sorceress being burned at the stake by devotees of the magic-hating god Yahzed, Alanna begs the Goddess for rain, and the Goddess brushes aside whatever power Yahzed had gathered to send "great

¹⁰ This may not necessarily be the case in every independent multideity work, of course. However, as it was observed in the sample works read for this category, it is reasonable to assume that it is, at the very least, a viable pattern, if not a universal absolute.

thunderheads [that] blotted out the sun” (*Woman* 217). Numerous times, then, throughout the quartet, does the Goddess intervene, to aid Alanna in situations that would have been beyond a mortal’s capacity to handle.

Despite the fact that Firefoot travels in disguise with Tailchaser for a significant portion of *Tailchaser’s Song*, the feline god does not often intervene in the decisive, battle-ending way that the Goddess does. Firefoot does, however, play a part in preventing captive cats in Hearteater’s underground dungeons from being completely broken by the evil god. When the prisoners begin to feel as though they are losing touch with what it truly means to be a cat—with their humanity, as it were—telling tales of Firefoot gives them a sense of peace, gives them some reaffirmation of their true definition. Instead of feeling like slaving moles trapped underground, the cats, after the stories, feel for a moment “as though all the rocks and earth between those Folk and the sky had melted away, and they were singing together” beneath the moon (Williams 236). Invoking Firefoot through stories offers the imprisoned cats a defense against Hearteater’s attempts to transform them into something inhuman. Firefoot also intervenes more directly to protect Tailchaser. When Hearteater creates a deadly monster, and Tailchaser believes he and his friends are seconds from death, he recites a prayer to Firefoot—“Your hunter speaks/In need he walks/In need, but never in fear” (315). Hearing Tailchaser’s assertion of need, Firefoot sheds his disguise as Eatbugs, speaking with a voice that “was the melody of night, of things that know the old, delicate pattern that earth and her things know” (316). He then rushes to fight Hearteater and the monster he had created, to save the cats from his god brother and his creature, which mortals could not have hoped to fight on their own.

Even the distant Nocturna of *Silverwing* and *Sunwing* intervenes to help her mortal children when they are unable to help themselves. At the end of *Sunwing*, an eclipse has cloaked the sun,

and Zotz has demanded “the lives of one hundred, their hearts,” given in sacrifice to him during its duration (*Sun* 139). These sacrifices will “kill the sun” and allow Zotz to enter the world and reign supreme over it (*Sun* 139). The protagonist Shade and his allies have already liberated many of the intended sacrificial victims from the ancient pyramid that houses the cannibalistic vampire bats. However, an explosive disc plummets toward the pyramid, and, if it hits during the eclipse, then Zotz indeed would have his sacrifice. Shade realizes he need only delay the disc’s descent with sound until the end of the eclipse, need only buy a few minutes for the pyramid to be evacuated—but also realizes that he cannot succeed alone. So “for the first time in his life, he spoke to her, and called her by name and said: ‘Nocturna, let me be able to do this’” (*Sun* 245). And Nocturna does intervene, loaning her own power to Shade, for it seems to the bat as though “something greater were speaking through him,” with a yell “like a thunderclap shattering the sky” (*Sun* 245). Nocturna may be a more distant parent than the Goddess or Firefoot, but when a problem arises that her mortal children cannot face alone, Nocturna still intervenes to protect her affiliates just as the parent-gods of the other works do.

Noteworthy about all of these examples is the fact that the gods generally do not intervene in a situation until the mortals ask for their help—Alanna calling for the Goddess, Tailchaser asserting that he is in need to Firefoot, Shade pleading for strength from Nocturna. The fact that the mortal children are asking these gods for help shows a belief in the god as parent. The mortals believe that these particular gods will listen to their requests, will show a special interest in them. They have faith that the gods would be willing to act to help them, almost miraculously, when they cannot help themselves, just as children turn to parents for seemingly miraculous solutions to problems beyond their scope. While some might argue that the possibility and the practice of divine intervention work counter to the ability of mortals to act

independently, the fact remains that, in all of these examples, the gods do not intervene until the mortals request their help, often against something that it would be impossible for a mortal to overcome with purely mortal powers. The parent-gods do not stifle their mortal children's wishes and attempts to act independently. Rather, they appear when they are asked, to assist when a mortal's independent action would not be sufficient. While the god sometimes intervenes to defeat an illness or powerful evil magic, the more common situation in which a parent-god is called upon for help is when a mortal is under imminent threat from another god. The mortals, the children of the texts, cannot be expected to stand against adults, against other gods. It makes sense, then, that the parent-god would act in these situations, realizing that these particular battles are ones for which a mortal child is simply not equipped.

It may be especially crucial that parent-gods intervene against villainous gods, the negative gods of the fantasy world. By intervening in the short-term against a negative god, by perhaps superseding a mortal's opportunity to act independently in one instance, a parent-god may in fact be ensuring that the mortal child would have the ability to act independently in the future. For the negative gods of a fantasy work are decidedly unconcerned with parenting, with fostering independent action, with guiding the mortal children toward the version of humanity they wish to achieve. In other words, negative gods are not at all concerned with defining humanity in a way that will allow mortals to succeed in their own goals, their own lives. The interest of negative gods, in fact, is often not positive definition, but subjugation. While negative gods may define mortals, that is generally not their primary goal. Their focus is not the success of a mortal child, but the success of a god—their own success. Both Hearteater and Zotz define their followers as violent and monstrous, and enslave the affiliates of other gods in an attempt to overthrow the other gods. Hearteater's Clawguard have "snakelike" faces and bodies more badger-like than

cat-like, with “wide, spatulate paws... [and] red talons, hooked nails the color of blood” (Williams 195). Hearteater’s torturers and slave-drivers, they force the other cats to behave unnaturally, digging tunnels when “cats weren’t meant to dig” and unwittingly expanding Hearteater’s underground network of power (222). Zotz’s vampire bats are cannibals, thriving on bloodshed and sacrifice, and following Zotz’s every order to help Zotz overthrow Nocturna and rule the world as a single, unchallenged deity, keeping a breeding supply of northern bats as “eternal sacrificial offerings” (*Silver* 126). These negative gods provide a striking counterexample to the positive parent-gods—and provide an excellent example of an entity against which a mortal acting independently simply could not succeed.¹¹

Negative gods, then, if they can be said to define mortals at all, are defining them in a way that is better suited to the interests of the gods than the interests of the mortals. The opposite is true for the positive gods, especially the parent-gods. The ways in which they define humanity, the example they teach, is decidedly to improve the lot of the mortal. Parent-gods want to define humanity in a way that is beneficial to their human affiliates. Just as an ideal parent would have the best interests of a child at heart, so too do parent-gods have the best interests of their mortal affiliates. These best interests undoubtedly include the ability for mortal children to act independently of a god. Complete dependence on a parent, even a parent as powerful as a deity, would not be good for any child, and so, a positive parent-god would encourage at least some independence.

In independent multideity works, parent-gods might also encourage choice—a mortal’s ability to choose which version of humanity is best for him or her. Just because a particular

¹¹ *The Song of the Lioness* quartet is not mentioned in this example as there is no negative god within it, except for perhaps Yahzed, but he is such a minor presence as compared to Hearteater or Zotz that he is scarcely worth mentioning. The main villain of the quartet is a mortal sorcerer, whom Alanna defeats without any intervention from the Goddess.

definition of humanity might be best for one mortal does not necessarily mean it would be ideal for all mortals. Thus, it would be in the best interests of the mortals for multiple gods—and thus, multiple definitions of humanity—to exist. Parent-gods, or even potential parent-gods, would want to allow human beings some independent choice as to the version of humanity they wish to strive for and to live by, in the hopes that the mortals would then be able to find the particular definition of humanity ideal for them. The advice and guidance of parent-gods in these works, and the direct intervention of gods in the lives of mortals, are all to guarantee that options will continue to exist for mortals. Parent-gods work to ensure that their mortal children will be able to act independently, even if that independent action is calling upon a god for help, and to ensure that mortals will have some choice as to which god they affiliate with—for it is through this choice that mortals can maintain some say in the definition of their own humanity.

Chapter Three

Growing Up God-equal:

The Created Multideities

Making choices, however, means having to select between a number of options. Even though the independent multideities, being characters themselves, are complex and multifaceted enough to present a version of humanity appealing to numerous mortals, the possibility might still arise that a mortal would not find an acceptable parent-god, an acceptable example of humanity to follow. If one cannot find a god, however, why not construct one's own? Making gods is at the heart of the created multideity category. Works that fit into this category contain two or more gods whose existence as gods, as would-be adults on a different plane from humanity, is in some way determined by the mortals within a fantasy world. However, it is rarely so simple as a mortal unhappy with the current choice of gods stepping in to manufacture his or her own, more appropriate deity. In fact, oftentimes, the mortal characters who exist in the present day of a work have no idea that they are, in fact, creating the gods that are defining them—nor that the gods are commonly not at all on a different plane than the mortals themselves. While the gods of the independent multideity works are clearly distinct from the mortals, the line between these created multideities and the mortals of their works is far less clear. Within this category, the black-and-white boundaries of the adult-child division between gods and mortals blur considerably into gray.¹

Doro is one of the gods of Octavia Butler's novel *Wild Seed*, which tracks the interactions of the superhumans Doro and Anyanwu, and their often-conflicting attempts to create human

¹ Though the gods in this category are often, per the argument, not far removed from mortals, I will continue to refer to them as gods throughout the chapter. The term "god" will then often refer to an individual that is perceived as a god by other characters within the text.

communities, through the early centuries of the African slave trade to the eve of the Civil War. Similarities between Doro and gods from the independent multideity category certainly exist, at least at a superficial level. In the first pages of the text, he thinks it his duty to protect his “seed village,” a group of loyal and obedient affiliates he has gathered (Butler 3). Doro has many such villages, some in Africa, some in North America. He steers individuals with unique powers—from telepathy to telekinesis to heightened prescience—into these communities, to live in the way he dictates (122). It is stated bluntly, both in the third-person narration and by mortal characters themselves, that “Doro [was] their god” (49, 51, 105, 145). Doro, however, is no more divine than the supernaturally talented mortals he gathers in his villages. Almost four thousand years old, Doro’s power involves the ability to pass his consciousness from body to body—though doing so kills the host body (63). In the world Butler has created, individuals with a potential for supernatural power go through a dangerous transition in their young adulthood, after which they begin to realize their abilities (116). Doro, however, transitioned too soon, and, panicking as his body died, jumped his consciousness into his parents, killing them both before going on to take other bodies (190). Because he has immortality of a sort, Doro has great command over his powers, and great awareness of other supernaturally powerful individuals—and because of his long years of experience, he knows to remove any who might challenge him early, before they fully transition. Yet while he is perceived as a god, a reader is aware that he is not truly a god like Firefoot or Nocturna, not an entity extant on a level apart from humanity. He is simply a human with superhuman powers—and the drive to use them to rule over lesser mortals. “After a single generation,” people “learned to worship [Doro],” for those aware that he was not a god would die, taking their knowledge of his true nature with them

(191). For if Doro asserts that he is a god, backing his statements with superhuman feats, and the mortals in turn believe that he is a god—then is he not one?

Circumstances in part beyond Doro's control make him a god to some of the mortals in *Wild Seed*, and circumstances are also instrumental in manufacturing the purported Hindu gods of Roger Zelazny's futuristic novel *Lord of Light*.² Like Doro, who exercises control over the lives of his people as a god arguably would, Zelazny's Hindu gods also control the lives of mortals in this fantasy world, challenged by few except Sam, who styles himself as the Buddha to oppose them. Reincarnation has become a reality through a renewal science that enables the transfer of consciousness to new bodies—a science which the gods control. Prior to a body transfer, a mortal's brain is scanned. The gods may “read over [a mortal's] past life, weigh the karma, and determine [that mortal's] life that is yet to come” (Zelazny 56). It is, as one character observes astutely, “a perfect way of... ensuring Deicratic control”—for “the definition of bad karma is anything... the gods don't like” (56-57). Obviously, then, it is in the best interest of a death-fearing mortal to act as the gods dictate, lest they be denied reincarnation. The gods, however, are not truly gods, Hindu or otherwise. They are merely the crew of a ship that brought refugees from a ravaged Earth to a new planet centuries prior (10, 58). They are the first settlers. Their power stems from the fact that they hoard technology for themselves, while removing people who oppose them with each generation, until only the obedient, only those who are unaware that the gods are not truly gods, remain. As with Doro, their longevity gives them the ability to outlast other mortals—despite the fact that they are not truly on a plane removed from mortals as independent multideities are.

² *Lord of Light* in no way suggests that the Hindu gods believed in within the world of reality are fictitious or created by their worshippers. As will be elaborated within this chapter, mortals within this fantasy world assume the identity of the Hindu gods. In this way, they are created. But this has no bearing on the existence of or belief in the Hindu gods in the world of reality.

Created gods may even begin as less than human, existing on a plane actually below humanity. Such is certainly the case in the satirically tongue-in-cheek *Small Gods* by Terry Pratchett, which critiques organized religion and all but compels readers to consider just in whom—or in what—they believe. In this fantasy world, “there are billions of gods... the small gods—the spirits of places where two ant trails cross, the gods of microclimates down between the grass roots” (Pratchett 6-7). They remain as small gods, scarcely more than drifting spirits, because they do not have humans to believe in them. Gods of this world “grow and flourish *because they are believed in*” (108). However, the mortals do not realize that their belief fuels the powers of the gods. Indeed, when one philosopher suggests as much, he is executed by the Omnian Church (109). Om, the main god of the novel, has a powerful church, which he commands through the “seven books of the Prophets,” as well as “the Laws and the Songs,” which are enforced by his followers with an iron fist (22). Just as all other gods within this world, however, Om began as a small god and, in the event that people would cease believing in him, he would again become a small god, “no more than a smoky bundle of memories” (247).

None of these gods, then, exist on a distinct plane above that of mortals. They are either mortals themselves, with superpowers or technology giving them a godlike advantage, or lesser beings that thrive on exactly what humans place in a god—belief. That these created gods are not elevated from humanity, as the gods in independent multideity works are, is reinforced by the fact that all three of the sample works are told, at least in part, from the god’s perspective. Such a technique is not seen in the independent multideity works, in which the gods are completely distinct from humanity. A mortal reader, then, would theoretically be unable to relate to them. However, the fact that authors of the created multideity works include narration from the gods’ points of view indicates that there is something about them to which a reader can relate. They

are not wholly distinct from mortals. Because they were, in their respective works, created by mortals, they are, in a way, still like mortals themselves, which renders these created gods more readily accessible than the independent gods of other works.³

Accessibility to readers aside, the fact that a god is created does not deny them the power to undertake one of the primary actions of a god. A created god is still, in some sense, a god, and still has the power to define humanity. However, many of the gods in created multideity works define their human affiliates—or perhaps subjects is a more accurate term—in bizarre or extreme ways. Many created deities have the authority of adults over children, and are able to compel certain kinds of action. However, these gods also lack the concern for the well-being of mortal children that would transform them from mere adults, mere authorities, into parents. In independent multideity works, such as *The Song of the Lioness* and *Tailchaser's Song*, multiple gods in a fantasy world are positive gods, working to define humanity for the benefit of mortals. However, in created multideity works, a substantial number of gods are negative gods. As with *Heart eater* and *Zotz*, their interest is not in guiding mortals, but serving themselves. While the gods may insinuate themselves into the role of adult within a work, they do not take on the role of parent. Their interest is less in mortal definition, and more in mortal subjugation, and most definition offered by the gods is to make the mortals into subjects that will further a god's own agenda.

In *Wild Seed*, as noted, Doro can transfer his consciousness from body to body, killing host after host in order to keep himself alive (Butler 13). Over centuries of experimentation, Doro discovers that mortals with powers last longer as host bodies for him (114). The seed villages he creates are effectively breeding grounds for supernaturally powerful people, with Doro defining

³ I would not consider writing from a god's point of view to be wholly indicative of a created multideity work. However, the fact that all three authors of the sample works use such a technique may indicate that it is a pattern worth observing.

their way of life solely to keep a ready supply of bodies for himself. However, to ensure a maximum number of gifted individuals, Doro forces his followers to adhere to a regimented breeding program, with he himself selecting who will produce children and when, and often forcing incestuous relationships and inbreeding. While this strategy may lead to children with incredible powers, it also leads to unstable individuals so sensitive to thoughts that they cannot bear to live in close proximity with others and broken madmen that are “bad-tempered,” “suspicious,” inbred, and “willing... to murder” (48-49). Doro’s strategy is to seduce or terrify people into complete obedience to him (223). He defines them only to produce more gifted offspring for his use, and cares little for them beyond this. Doro, in fact, states plainly that “there is only one abomination: disobedience” to him (130). All that his mortal affiliates can do wrong, in his eyes, is not to do as he demands, not follow his dictates exactly. It is blatantly obvious that he has no intention of improving the lives of the mortals who follow him.

As for the Hindu gods of *Lord of Light*, they often play a role in actively preventing the improvement of mortals’ lives. As noted, with their control of the reincarnation machines and their possession of mind-reading probes, the gods can prevent disloyal mortals from being reborn, subjecting them to “the real death” (Zelazny 56). However, they can also do arguably worse. Instead of simply killing an enemy, they might place his or her consciousness into “a body shot full of cancer,” or that of a water buffalo, dog, or monkey (56). Sam, for example, one of the individuals standing against the gods, is almost tricked into taking an epileptic body, which would have effectively ended his resistance (74). The Hindu gods also want to keep their technology from the mortals, claiming that, after generations without it, the mortals simply are not ready for it, that having it given as a gift from the gods would “destroy the first stable society on this planet” (67). Their actions and motivations are decidedly suspect, of course, for the gods

also destroy any signs of technology that the mortals themselves create. For example, “the printing press has been rediscovered on three occasions... and suppressed each time” (67). Any suspicion proves well-founded, for the gods reveal their true motivations when discussing their reasons for not supporting Accelerationism, the movement to provide technology to the mortals. To do so would be to raise the mortals’ “condition of existence to a higher level... Then every man would be as a god, you see. The result of this, of course, would be that there would no longer be any gods” (186). The gods are patently uninterested in improving the lives of mortals because doing so would mean relinquishing their own power. By refusing them technology, the gods certainly define mortals’ existence—but they do so to keep them in a position of subservience.

Though, by the time *Small Gods* begins, the god Om has been reduced to the shape of a small tortoise, a reader is able to glean, from the state of his church and the country of Omnia, exactly how Om controlled the lives of his mortal followers. With church songs like “Claws of Iron Shall Rend the Ungodly” and “The Way of the Infidel Is a Nest of Thorns,” statues with titles like “Om Trampling the Ungodly,” and only one book permitted in the country, it is evident that Om led his followers toward violence and intolerance (Pratchett 274, 18, 28, 170, 171). Om’s teachings also encouraged his most zealous followers to take part in what is essentially the Spanish Inquisition on steroids. The people of Omnia have “a great deal to fear,” because their Inquisition is without flaw—“the Great God would not have seen fit to put the suspicion in the minds of his exquisites unless it was *right* that it should be there” (22, 60). Om also teaches—erroneously—that he is the only god, to keep other gods from stealing away his believers, to keep as many people subservient to him as possible (24). As long as he has enough believers, in fact, Om cares little for any individual follower. He allowed his first believer, a simple

shepherd, to be “stoned to death,” while he led his other, newly-gathered followers in a raid against the ruling god of the region, during which his worshippers “[broke] into the temple and smashed the altar and [threw] the priestesses out of the window to be torn apart by wild dogs” (117). Om in the past had absolutely no interest in defining the mortals who affiliated with him. He had no interest in creating a version of humanity in which mortals were anything other than servants.

Despite the significant number of negative gods, however, within a created multideity work, there is often an individual who speaks out against the subjugation of mortals by the gods, who denounces the gods and their power. This individual may be a god, may be like the gods but unwilling to lump himself or herself into an identity as a deity, or may simply have come to realize that the gods themselves, these created deities, are nothing much greater than humans. Nonetheless, this individual is, or becomes, in some way equal to the gods. He or she becomes an adult, an authority, in his or her own right in the work. At the start of these works, the gods are generally still the adults of the fantasy world, with the humans in the role of child, being defined by the gods—though often being defined negatively, in a way that is more subjugation than definition. Throughout the course of the work, however, the god-equal will step forward, telling the humans that they are capable of being independent, that they do not need to subject themselves to the control of the gods. While the gods of independent multideity works are parents and remain parents, a role perceived as positive by both readers and mortal characters, the many negative gods of created multideity works are neither seen as being positive definers of humanity, nor as acting like parents. Rather, it is the god-equal who assumes the role of parent within the novel. The mortals are still children, in a sense, but they are grown children. They are adults in their own right, fully capable of defining themselves, of acting as their own

authorities—but they are not aware of this. They are not aware that they, as children, have grown up, have every right to be the equals of the gods, the adults, of the fantasy world. The task of the god-equal, who assumes a role in created multideity works in some way equivalent to that of parent-god in independent multideity works, is to encourage the mortals to shed their child role and step into the role of the adult, the individual able to act and develop independently of the gods they have created, the individual capable of defining himself or herself. The god-equal, with an adult authority on a par with the gods, must show the mortals that the gods are not actually on a plane above them. This is not a parent in a relationship with a child that is still young. This is a parent speaking to his or her grown offspring, informing them that they are children no longer and can deal with the gods, the adults they encounter, as equals.

The god-equal of *Wild Seed*, who is very god-like herself, is Anyanwu. In her home village in Africa, Anyanwu was not considered a goddess by her people, but rather a powerful shaman “through whom a god spoke” (Butler 5). She, however, possesses supernatural powers that could equal Doro’s—she possesses superhuman strength, and is able to shapeshift and heal a myriad of illnesses.⁴ Her powers alone would place her in a position of god-equal, a position Doro only strengthens by removing her from her village. While Doro feels that he is harnessing her powers, using her to serve his own ends as he uses supernaturally powerful mortals, he is actually instating her as his rival. Because her power can compete with, and in some instances supersede, his, she presents a viable, “positive, empowering alternative to [Doro’s] domination,” another definition of humanity to the mortals forced to follow Doro.⁵ She is visibly on a level

⁴ Also, Anyanwu’s power not only matches Doro’s, but does actively trump it in some instances. For example, when she shapeshifts, Doro is unable to sense her, and thus unable to track her. She can remove herself from his telepathic grid to escape any pursuit from him.

⁵ Sarah Wood, “Subversion through Inclusion: Octavia Butler’s Interrogation of Religion in *Xenogenesis* and *Wild Seed*,” *FEMSPEC: An Interdisciplinary Feminist Journal Dedicated to Critical and Creative Work in the Realms of Science Fiction, Fantasy, Magical Realism, Surrealism, Myth, Folklore, and Other Supernatural Genres* 6.1 (2005): 95. Hereafter cited in text.

equal to him, the only other character in the novel with enough strength and will to counter the god as a goddess.

For a time, Doro attempts to define Anyanwu, to subjugate her as he does the other mortals that he has forced into affiliation with him. While he is attracted to her and approves of her on many levels, Doro is also bitterly angry that Anyanwu does not love him “like a god in human form” (Butler 170). He is unable to control her, and, after he causes the death of one of her children, she permanently leaves the seed village in which Doro has placed her. Anyanwu, however, then begins, on the surface level, to do exactly what Doro is doing—gather supernaturally talented people together to live. Beginning to define her own people, she is acting in the capacity of a goddess herself. However, while “Doro becomes powerful through his creation of an empire of bodies, who in exchange for their worship he consumes, Anyanwu derives her power from the community” (Wood 94). Her relationship with her mortal affiliates is far more like the relationships between parent-gods and mortal children in independent multideity works than the negative relationship so often cultivated in created multideity works. Anyanwu does not compel mortals to enter her community, but rather invites them, creating a safe haven for them. They come to her freely, and Anyanwu not only cares for them as a parent, but encourages them to care for each other (Butler 246-247). Her definition of humanity is not based on calculated reproduction, but on the creation of families. She, like parent-gods, is also a strong proponent of choice, inviting her affiliates to worship the Christian god or other gods as they see fit, to find a belief system that they feel would optimally define them (Butler 286).

While, for a time, it seems as though Anyanwu might have to fight Doro as a goddess, she comes to realize that that would confirm that Doro is a god—which is the exact opposite of what she wishes to do (Butler 138-140). Instead of fighting him with divinity, Anyanwu elects to

challenge Doro with mortality. Despite the fact that she is clearly a god-equal, she places herself on a level with mortals, while still challenging the would-be god Doro. This sets a precedent, for if she is equal to Doro, but also claims to be mortal, then Doro himself must be mortal. Before attempting to take her own life, however, she continues to define her children, giving them guidance and advice, but also steering them toward independence. For example, she does not want her affiliates to rely forever on her healing abilities as a crutch, so she teaches them herblore and other medicinal skills, believing that “they should learn to help themselves” (286). Anyanwu is not a parent of young children, who will continue to need her indefinitely. She is the parent of offspring on the verge of adulthood, and as she guides them toward being able to care independently for themselves, she is preparing them for a life as adults.

At the conclusion of *Wild Seed*, however, Anyanwu decides to live, feeling that her presence will help to return Doro to his roots as a human. And while Anyanwu does stay with her community of affiliates, acting as an example of humanity for them, she gives up her role as goddess completely, renouncing the parent-child division between gods and mortals that characterizes multideity works. Living in the United States, she decides to adopt an English name. She chooses Emma, which means “ancestress” (Butler 297). While her mortal affiliates are still, sometimes literally, her descendants, they are no longer beholden to her as children. They are grown, able to fight their own battles, able to define themselves for themselves. And “ancestress” clearly reflects this. She could have chosen a name that would identify her as a goddess, would indicate that she thought of herself as having entered a plane above mortals, and would relegate the humans of the novel forever into a child-role. However, Anyanwu instead casts herself as an elder, venerable and respected, but still human. By removing Doro from his role as god, and then casting herself as a mortal, she has removed divine definers from the

equation, and made it possible for mortals to begin defining themselves. While she will undoubtedly continue to provide her grown mortal children with advice, her potentiality for god-like authority has vanished. She is still a parent, but she is the parent of grown children, and her interactions with them promise to be the interactions of equals.

Sam, the main character of *Lord of Light*, also aims for equality between the gods and mortals within his fantasy world. Because of who he is within the fantasy world, however, he is placed on equal footing with the gods. Millennia ago, the planet Earth was destroyed. Some of those who escaped, however, were the people aboard the spaceship the *Star of India* (Zelazny 258). Upon the ship's arrival at a new, habitable planet, however, a division arose between the crew and the passengers. The former became the gods of the world, hoarding the technology that they had salvaged to build themselves "an impregnable paradise" (66). The passengers, meanwhile, were left to "wander a vicious world," and only after they had reverted, in some sense, "to savagery" did the crew, now the gods, step in to provide them with guidance—and after years of savagery, any definition as humans, even if it meant servitude, was likely an improvement (66). Sam, being a member of the crew, is clearly a god-equal. For years, he was privy to many of the godly technological benefits, but thus is also well-aware that the gods are, in fact, no such thing. The gods, however, are eager to disguise that fact, and, with the passage of years, remove more and more people who remember that they are truly nothing more than mortals with a technological advantage. Even Sam, who is absent for a span of time, finds it difficult to determine which of his old companions are which gods, for "they all wear different bodies than they did a generation ago, [and] they all use god names," concealing their humble mortal roots (58). And Sam, one of the first like them, is both a god-equal and a threat. If he does not join them, he might reveal the truth of their purported divinity to the masses. Sam, then,

when going before the gods for reincarnation, faces the choice of either “deification or extinction” (51).

Like Anyanwu, however, Sam is a god-equal who does not want to be a god. For him, the distinction between gods and mortals is as artificial as that between crew and passengers, and his perception of equality between gods and mortals drives many of his actions. He is the primary proponent of Accelerationism, of sharing “the benefits of the technology [the gods] had preserved,” for he deems that this would be “a fair and equitable way to run a world” (Zelazny 66). However, as Anyanwu contemplates fighting Doro as a goddess, Sam finds that he must fight religious belief with religious belief. While the rest of the crew have transformed themselves into the Hindu pantheon, Sam takes up the mantle of the Buddha to compete with them, to try to persuade the mortals that humanity’s definition should not come from the gods. Sam, however, is adamant that his move toward godhood in his own right is far from what he would have preferred—“I never wanted to be a god... It was only later, only when I saw what they were doing, that I began to gather what power I could to me” (11).

And Sam does gather many followers to hear him teach, at least one of whom is completely redefined by him. This man, Sugata, was originally a devotee of Kali and totally committed to emulating her version of humanity—which meant acting as her assassin (Zelazny 89). Sent to kill Sam and put an end to his heretical teachings, Sugata falls ill as he stalks his target, and Sam, finding him, nurses him back to health. Recovering, Sugata asks Sam what action he will take now that he knows Sugata is an assassin. Sam, however, refuses to take any action at all, refuses to give Sugata any cues as to how he should respond to the situation or any commands as to how to act. The relationship between the two becomes Sam’s battle against the gods in microcosm. For instead of preaching obedience, or even rebellion, to his captive audience, Sam says simply,

“If anything is to be done, it is you who will do it” (92). Just as Sam attempts to do with all the mortals, Sam drives home to Sugata the importance of self-definition—that if anyone is to decide how he will live, the path of humanity he will follow in the future, it should be him. Sam’s teachings, like the gods’, are meant to define humanity. But Sam’s definition is based on self-sufficiency, not subservience. Like Anyanwu, he wants the mortals to have independence, to be free to define themselves. And, like Anyanwu, like a parent watching his grown children, he believes that they can do it.

Also like Anyanwu, Sam succeeds in breaking the subjugating definition the other gods exercise over humanity, and chooses to renounce god-equaling authority as the Buddha in order to “return to being a man” (Zelazny 288). He does not want to keep the authority of a god, does not want to continue defining humanity, for he believes that mortals should define themselves. And, again like Anyanwu, Sam’s name is key in understanding that he has truly relinquished a god’s power for an identity as a mortal. Several times throughout the novel, when asked if his name is Maitreya or Lord of Light or Kalkin or Siddhartha, Sam always says that it is not and corrects, “My name is Sam” (203, 282). Despite acknowledging that he must be a god-equal in order to have the authority to define humans, he does not, as the other gods do, try to conceal the fact that he himself is mortal. The other gods, from Brahma to Kali to Shiva, have all abandoned the names that link them to their original mortal identities. Sam, however, always confirms his. The novel, in fact, begins with the following lines: “His followers called him Mahasamatman and said he was a god. He preferred to drop the Maha- and the –atman, however, and called himself Sam” (1). The repetition of these lines in the last pages of the work enforces that Sam, despite acting as a god throughout the novel, has not become one (294). He has not changed from the individual he was on page one—the individual who did not want to assume a false

identity built on false authority and the erroneous perceptions of his mortal equals, the individual who did not want to become a god, only to remain a man, and the individual who nevertheless realized that, in order for himself and other mortals to define themselves as they wished, he had to temporarily equal the created gods in order to depose them.

While Anyanwu and Sam are both god-equals by circumstance—Anyanwu with powers similar to Doro's, Sam with a history like that of the Hindu gods—the situation is somewhat different in *Small Gods*. At the start of the work, Brutha, the main character involved in leading mortals to see that they do not need to follow the example of the gods, but can define themselves, is actually a mortal, a plain and simple novice in the god Om's temple citadel (Pratchett 8). Brutha is more than a mere novice, however, for he did not “just believe [in the god]. He really Believed,” having grown up “in the sure and certain knowledge of the Great God Om” (21-22). Of all the mortal characters in the text, Brutha is conceivably the least likely to ever consider, let alone want, to define himself, to see himself as an equal to the gods—let alone act as a parent to coax other mortal children into understanding their equality with the created deities.

Om, however, at the start of the novel, is not really Great God material any longer. Instead of being the mighty, horned creature that his followers know from temple statues, he has been relegated to the form of a tortoise, “small and basically yellow and covered with dust,” with a “badly chipped” shell and “one beady eye” (Pratchett 17). This is because the gods of *Small Gods* rely on belief to fuel their power, and Om finds that Brutha is the only true believer in the whole citadel (83). This does not mean that the mortals have stopped being defined by Om, however. As Om's would-be mortal believers carry out his teachings, they continue to live by the example of humanity he has set. However, while the passage of time worked favorably for the Hindu gods and Doro, it works against Om. As he has not been directly involved in the lives

of the mortals for some generations, his followers have ceased to believe in him, and only believe in the structure of his church, in the example he has set (177). The church has, in way, become a god in its own right. However, part of what enables the gods to be such effective definers of humanity is the fact that they are characters, and, like other characters, they are able to change and adapt if need be. Because a god here is not actively defining the mortals, and the mortals are certainly not defining themselves as individuals, the version of humanity that arises is far from a positive one—if Om’s version ever was a positive one.

Om’s version of humanity, however, does take a turn for the positive as the novel progresses. Indeed, of all the created multideity works, *Small Gods* focuses most around the character development of the god-character. For, interacting with Brutha as a minor being instead of a great god, Om finds that he is becoming concerned with things like fairness and unfairness, which are not supposed to trouble a god (Pratchett 113). While trying to bargain with the sea goddess for the lives of some mortals, Om attempts to use an argument of fairness and “underlying justice,” only to realize that “he wasn’t thinking like a god” (217). Because “minds leaked into one another,” Om’s close connection with Brutha, and his mortal’s-eye view of how mortal existence actually works, steers him toward a better understanding of mortals in their own right, into understanding that they are not mindless followers, children to be shoved into line, but people worthy of being dealt with fairly, equally. And if Om is learning that mortals are not really so far below gods, then Brutha is learning that gods are really no better than mortals. Om notices a change in Brutha’s thoughts, that Brutha is “beginning to think in godly ways” (135). However, Om also knows that he is not the one defining Brutha in this way—“Brutha was doing it to himself” (135). Om, in effect, receives a crash course in comprehending that mortals need not be dependent on gods for their definition. Brutha also begins to question Om as a definer,

asking him if he really knows what it is like to be human, accusing him of refusing to truly help people so he could instead “stamp around and roar and try to make people afraid” (258-259).

That Brutha has come to realize that he is an equal to the god can be no clearer than when Om, attempting to get Brutha to do as he says, snaps, “I am your God!”—to which Brutha replies, “And I am my me” (178). Om’s godhood holds no more power to influence Brutha’s actions than Brutha’s own humanity. Through moments like this, the two characters come to see one another as being on equal footing, with Om realizing that he is not really above Brutha and Brutha realizing that he can define his own humanity just as well as Om could. While the playing field began with an adult, a god, firmly believing in his superiority over a mortal child, that child grows through the novel to realize that he is an adult himself, that he is the equal of the god. Not only that, but the god himself realizes that mortals should not be lorded over as children, but dealt with fairly as adults. Om and Brutha reach an understanding—an equality.

It is fitting, then, that they together fill the god-equal position of the novel, cooperating in the parental role of not only making sure the children realize they are adults, but that the other adults realize this as well. While Anyanwu and Sam were in and of themselves both mortal and god, here a mortal and a god actually join together to fill the role that these single protagonists did. Through fortuitous circumstances, Om saves Brutha at an opportune moment, gaining sudden and fervent belief from a crowd of onlookers. He and Brutha, who is now, in the eyes of the crowd, Om’s Prophet, begin to hash out a new way to define humanity, one in which, Brutha tells Om, there will be “no commandments unless you obey them too” (Pratchett 325). The two go on to create a “constitutional religion,” a democratic relationship between gods and mortals—a relationship that would never work unless the two sides viewed one another as equals (326). As in the other created multideity works, the god-equal rejects subjugation for self-definition. It

is again the combination of mortal and god, only this time through two people instead of both in one, that leads the mortals of the fantasy world to understand that they can interact with the gods as equal adults.

The god-equals in these works all have the power of gods. They are all, at some point in their respective novels, on par with the gods—they are all adults. Even Om and Brutha, perhaps the most questionable god-equal combo, had the power to act as an adult over mortal children, passing down commandments to define humanity. These god-equals, however, are less like the other, overwhelmingly negative gods of created multideity works and more like the parent-gods of the independent multideity works, at least in their relationship to mortals. As the parent-god is set apart from the other independent multideities by the special interest he or she has in a mortal, so too is the god-equal different from the other gods in how he or she interacts with mortals. This difference in interaction is what places the god-equal in the role of parent to the other gods' roles as simple adults. Like the parent-gods, the god-equal wants to permit independent action by mortals. However, unlike the parent-gods, this independence is not the type a parent would give a child—at least, not the young child symbolically represented in the relationship between mortals and independent multideities. Rather, the independence that the god-equals in created multideity works want to grant their mortal children is that given to grown offspring. The division between parent and child in this category is not static. It is not the clearly defined duality of parent and child, god and mortal, found in the independent multideity works. The mortals are, in a way, still the children in these works, allowing the gods to dictate their actions, influence them as adults influence children. However, what the mortals do not always realize is that they are grown children. They are adults in their own right, and equal to the gods that are defining them. They are ready to step out of the parent-child relationship that would exist

between a young child and a parent, and enter into a relationship where they are adults as well. The god-equal is the necessary parent, an adult among adults who perceives that the mortal children are truly children no longer and need not be reliant upon an adult authority, a created god, for their definition.

The created multideities of these works are not like the independent multideities of the previous category. While gods like Firefoot and Nocturna are, by their very state of existence, on a plane above mortals and possessed of an authority over them, with an inherent power to define humanity for those mortals, such is not the case here. The authority of these created multideities stems not from their inherent superiority to mortals, but from access to different resources, and from mortal perception. The created gods have powers, either magical or technological, that the mortals simply do not have, which allows them to build a basis for authority over mortals. Their god-status, however, comes from the mortals themselves. It is certainly possible to perceive an individual as being in a position of authority without viewing that individual as a god. This suggests that the fact that gods are perceived as gods is simply a matter of perception, similar to the way children would perceive adults as super-powerful authority figures, when in actuality, especially after a certain age, life experience is the only difference between them. There is little difference between the mortals and the created gods. The authority of the gods exists because mortals believe it does, and the gods do not disabuse them of this notion. Powers or technology give these would-be gods the potential for authority, but it is the belief of mortals that makes them gods.

Human beings in this sort of work, unlike in independent multideity works, initially create the gods that will define them. Hypothetically, they are not bound to a finite number of examples of humanity upon which to base themselves, but in order to be defined by gods, by

adult authorities, they still must sacrifice independent self-definition and take up a child's role, allowing a force presumably greater than themselves to dictate their actions.⁶ Yet the fact remains that the gods of this category are merely constructs, and that the mortal children are actually grown, playing as children when they should be adults. Once they have relegated themselves to this role of child, however, there is no ready escape, for a child standing foolishly against adults often seems more insolent than anything else. Because they have resigned themselves to the role of child, they need an adult to stand for them in the adult arena, as well as to reveal to them the truth of the situation—that their perception is skewed and that they are adults in their own right, equals to those they see as gods and capable of defining their own humanity. This adult, this god-equal, stands in the role of parent to these grown offspring.

Interestingly enough, the god-equal is often created just as much as the gods are. Because Anyanwu's affiliates see her as Doro's equal, she becomes so. Because Sam's followers grant his example of humanity as much validity as the Hindu gods', he becomes like a god himself. And because the people of Omnia link Om and Brutha together as a god and his voice among mortals, they both share equal power to define humanity for their followers. What the mortals essentially do, in each of these works, is create an individual in a position of godlike authority, going so far as to regard this individual as a god himself or herself. This god-equal, this authority, then informs the mortals that they do not need the guidance of the created gods, but are capable of being their own decision-makers, their own definers. What is important in this would-be god's perception, what makes this god-equal a parent among adults, is the fact that he or she recognizes that the roles of child and parent are not static, as they are in independent multideity works. They are not metaphorical categories here, but literal progressions. The

⁶ Why human beings might prefer to have a god define them, rather than defining themselves, would likely require another thesis. Human reasons for abandoning, at least for a time, their own self-definition would be fascinating but, as the focus of this thesis is the role of the gods, the answer to this question will not be addressed here.

human children grow up, coming to realize that the gods are really no different than they. The gods either accept that these young adults as equals, or are summarily removed from power, for their authority means little in the absence of children to follow their example. The god-equals act like good parents should. They perceive when their children are grown and capable of making their own decisions, and then encourage them to make those decisions, to choose how to define themselves. Growing up in created multideity works does not mean becoming a god, however. It simply means realizing that the gods themselves were really no different from mortals—that the division of god and mortal, adult and child, was simply a creation, with the reality being that all involved were equally human.

Chapter Four

No Other Gods Besides Me:

The Independent Monodeities

With the two multideity categories described and the role of god as parent within both categories analyzed, the focus may now shift to the next group of gods—the monodeities. While multideity works could fall into the realm of either polytheism or monolatry, according to Wright’s definitions, gods in the monodeity categories are participants in pure monotheism. Not only is a god the right god for a particular group of people, each god is the sole god in his particular work.¹ And of course, in independent monodeity works, this sole god exists, and would exist, without human agency and action. His power as a god is not derived from his relationship with humanity. Yet his status as the sole god within a work places him in an interesting position. While the gods in multideity works represent multiple examples of humanity, offering multiple insights as to what it means to be human to both the human characters in their works and to the readers, the independent monodeity must encompass all of humanity. The sheer magnitude of this task is doubtless part of the reason why the gods of independent monodeity works read less like the parental figure of the multideity works and more as a definitive *god*, in the sense that readers familiar with Western monotheistic religions, especially Christianity, might define the term—a singular, omnipotent being.²

The gods falling within this category are indeed singular entities, each possessed of incredible power that is clearly demonstrated within the respective works. Aslan, for example,

¹ The fact that the gods in all three independent monodeity works examined are male is perhaps worth noting. This may be a reflection of how closely Judeo-Christian monotheism is linked to monodeities in fantasy novels by Western authors. It may, of course, have other implications more suited to research dealing more closely with portrayals of man and women in literature, or it may simply be an incidental sampling bias. Regardless, its implications will not be examined in any depth here.

² *WordNet: A Lexical Database for English*, Princeton University (31 January 2011).

from C.S. Lewis's classic children's novel *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, is able to shatter the evil White Witch's hold on the land of Narnia by breaking the spell of her hundred-year winter.³ Herne, the forest god of all living creatures, worshipped by the red deer of David Clement-Davies' young adult novel *Fire Bringer*, seeks re-balance to a world thrown off-kilter by the insidious teachings of the frighteningly Hitler-like Sgorr. Herne is able to march all the creatures of his world through the steps of his restoring Prophecy, amassing a flock of ravens massive enough to "cloak the sun," coaxing deer and wolves into fleeting cooperation, and even stationing a human—one of few in an animal-dominated text—into the right place to bring one of the Prophecy's final stanzas to pass (Clement-Davies 475-483). While *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* and *Fire Bringer* take place in established worlds, J.R.R. Tolkien's densely-but-poetically-written fictional history *The Silmarillion* details the creation of a world, rather than immediately beginning adventures in it. Middle-Earth, so familiar to readers of *The Lord of the Rings*, does not exist in the *Ainulindalë*, the first book of *The Silmarillion*—rather, it is made throughout the following chapters. The creation of Middle-Earth, certainly, reveals the power of Ilúvatar, the only true god of Tolkien's mythology. But the *Ainulindalë* also impresses upon its readers that the true power of Ilúvatar is in "the secret fire," "the Imperishable Flame" that fuels true creation, and that no other being in the world possesses— "for it is with Ilúvatar" alone (Tolkien 16).

It is not, of course, feats of power like these that make these gods less parental than those in multideity works—Firefoot, the Great Mother Goddess, and Nocturna all have some fairly impressive arrows in their divine quivers. In the real world, too, worshippers of monotheistic gods often refer to the deity with terms like "Father," obviously intimating a parent-child

³ C.S. Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, 1950 (New York: Scholastic, Inc., 1995), 117-122. Hereafter cited in text.

relationship between god and human. Songs in Catholic hymnals, for example, refer to the church's followers as "children" of God, as well as "brothers" and "sisters" in Christ.⁴ It does then seem strange to find these independent monodeities are less parental than their multideity counterparts, especially since Lewis's and Tolkien's texts may both be read as, if not wholly religious allegory, then rife with Christian symbolism. However, the assumption that a monodeity in a fantasy work must conform to a purely parent-child relationship with human beings simply because, in the world of reality, paternal terms are frequently used to describe a monotheistic god risks falling into the Vox Day trap, as described in the introduction. Simply because a fantasy world resembles reality's European medieval period does not mean some version of the Catholic Church needs to exist within it (Day 225). And simply because a single god exists within a work does not mean that that god needs to be regarded as a parent, merely because parental titles are used to refer to a monotheistic god in the world of reality.

This is not to say that these independent monodeities lack any parental attributes. Indeed, it may be argued that most god-characters in fantasy works depict some element of parenthood, for even the monodeities serve as definers of humanity. This sort of guiding and teaching from one more powerful, one with more knowledge of the workings of the world, certainly seems parental. Additionally, though Clement-Davies's Herne and Tolkien's Ilúvatar lack a closeness with their human worshippers, a closeness more readily observed in many multideity works, no clear-cut rule distinguishing monodeities as universally more distant than their multideity fellows exists. If it did, a glaring exception to it would undoubtedly be Aslan. While Ilúvatar remains in the Void after the creation of Middle-Earth, and Herne is presented most often as a whispering voice, Aslan is physically present in Narnia for almost half of *The Lion, the Witch, and the*

⁴ Robert J. Batastini and Michael A. Cymbala, eds., *Gather Comprehensive: Choir Edition*, (Chicago: GIA Publications, 1994). Specific songs with these references include "Let There Be Peace on Earth," "All Are Welcome," "Standin' in the Need of Prayer," and "City of God."

Wardrobe. He leads the attack on the White Witch in the final chapters of the book, and offers counsel and advice to many. For example, after the attack by Maugrim, the leader of the Witch's lupine secret police, Aslan instructs Peter on proper chivalric practices after battle, telling him to clean his bloodstained sword (Lewis 132). After the rescue of Edmund, who had betrayed his siblings to the Witch, Aslan speaks long to him as well. Lewis elects to keep this counseling conversation private even from his readers, but still affirms its significance as a defining moment for Edmund: "There is no need to tell you [the reader] (and no one ever heard) what Aslan was saying, but it was a conversation which Edmund never forgot" (139). Yet far from solely being a noble, regal war-leader, Aslan is also playful. In a beautifully light-hearted scene after his return to life, Aslan romps through a field with Susan and Lucy in celebration, taking part in a delightfully "mad chase" that ends with the three characters in "a happy laughing heap of fur and arms and legs" (163, 164). It is perhaps one of the closest moments between god and mortal in any of the works read, in any categorization of god.

So it is not a lack of closeness that makes gods falling into the monodeity category less parental as a whole.⁵ And, as noted, they, like multideities, serve the arguably parental role of defining humanity. However, it is, paradoxically, in part this role that makes monodeities less parental, not in the sense that they define humanity, but in regard to the much grander scale on which they must do so. The Great Mother Goddess in the independent multideity *The Song of the Lioness* quartet undoubtedly has many worshippers who follow her and model themselves after the example of humanity she represents and teaches. As noted, however, other human characters in the quartet would undoubtedly find following her example of humanity

⁵ The norm for the monodeity category does seem to be a more distant figure, just as the norm for the multideity category seems to be a closer relationship between god and humanity. However, just as Aslan provides an exception for the first half of this observation, so too might Nocturna from *Silverwing* and *Sunwing* act as exceptions to the second half. More works would need to be read in each category to determine whether this trend of closeness versus distance actually existed, or was simply a result of the sample works read.

counterproductive for their respective lifestyles. While warrior woman Alanna finds the Goddess's definition of humanity most appropriate in her life, the thief George Cooper likely would not, finding the example of humanity taught by the Crooked God to be more suited to his character (*Lioness* 192). However, in a monodeity work, the Goddess and the Crooked God, along with numerous others, would be one. Because one god would need to be accessible to both the moral Alanna and the cunning George, and a million unnamed mortals besides, the monodeity would lose many of the highly specific character qualities that make the multideities more parental. The element of special interest that made many of the multideities into parent-gods is not found here. It is the very lack of these qualities inherent in multideity works that move monodeities farther from being representative of parental authority and nearer to being solely representative of unchallenged and unchallengeable divine authority.

The completely absolute authority of an independent monodeity over a fantasy world, for example, rings more of godhood than parenthood. The absence of other gods means that there are no other possible authorities. And while parents may seem, at times, to their children to have absolute authority, this is not actually the case. There would always be other adults who would be at a level of equality with the parent. However, while in a multideity work there would be the god closest to the protagonist filling a defining role as parent, with other gods representing other adults and other possibilities for humanity, in monodeity works, there is only the parent, by default. However, what made the parent special, what made the particular god seem to be filling a parental role, was the special interest the god would take in an individual character (as the Goddess with Alanna) or group of characters (as Firefoot with the First-walkers in *Tailchaser's Song*). Without having the comparison of other gods and their differing levels of investment in characters, there is no basis on which to judge the level of interest a god gives to a particular

mortal. Because no non-parental adults are present, a monodeity cannot exhibit the special interest in a particular child that sets a parent apart.

Indeed, rather than being invested in only one fraction of humanity, monodeities are presented as having investment in all elements of humanity. This is often represented by the fact that monodeities are regarded as the gods of multiple species.⁶ Despite differences in culture and lifestyle, these different species, these different elements of humanity within a text, are all affiliates of the same monodeity. In *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, for example, Aslan is not depicted as being a god only of the four Pevensie siblings. The fact that he takes the shape of a lion is an indication that he is not representative only of the element of humanity that they represent—indeed, Mr. Beaver finds it laughable that Lucy should even have to ask whether Aslan is “a man” (Lewis 79). Mr. Beaver’s insistence that Aslan is “certainly not” a man may, also, of course, be read as further indication that Aslan is beyond mortal. The fact, too, that the Beavers are so excited at the prospect of Aslan’s coming is further indication that he has their belief, their worship, and they are quick to refer to him as “the King” (80). Again, Aslan is not god only to the physically human children, but the psychologically human Beavers. Finally, the scene where the children enter Aslan’s camp in the twelfth chapter depicts Aslan as surrounded by a “crowd of creatures,” including dryads, naiads, centaurs, leopards, and others (126). Again, the fact that so many different creatures of human intelligence follow him is an indication that, as a single deity, he defines numerous examples of humanity.

The god Herne from *Fire Bringer* is also presented as the god of all the creatures in the novel, though, as the main characters are red deer, he is most often described as resembling a deer. However, not only is he worshiped by multiple deer species, including fallow deer and

⁶ As indicated in Chapter One, works which include intelligent animals often present these different species as representing different cultures. The fact that some characters are deer while others are ravens, for example, does not, in the case of these fantasy texts, make either of those characters more or less “human.”

reindeer as well as red deer, but by many other creatures as well. During a conversation between Rannoch—the main character, and a red deer—and a mole, the mole becomes frightened and says, in a startled interjection, “Herne help us!” before disappearing underground (Clement-Davies 201). The raven Crak, one of the important non-deer characters in the novel, also refers to Herne in a way similar to the mole (285). There are no separate gods of moles or ravens. There is only Herne. The fact that he stands as god to all creatures, with their many and diverse mindsets and customs, reinforces the fact that he is accessible to all the iterations of humanity within the novel.

In *The Silmarillion*, Tolkien’s Ilúvatar also stands as the god of all creatures, though these creatures are decidedly more humanoid than the Beavers of *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* or the red deer of *Fire Bringer*. He is the creator of both Elves and Men, and created the two species to be of very different natures.⁷ The Elves Ilúvatar made more “like in nature to the Ainur,” the angel-like entities that were Ilúvatar’s first creations, and ensured that, by their natures, the Elves would “have the greater bliss in this world” of Middle-Earth (Tolkien 41). To Men, Ilúvatar gave “strange gifts,” including that of mortality as compared to the all but immortal Elves, as well as a natural inclination that “the hearts of Men should seek beyond the world and should find no rest therein” (41). In addition to these two species, Ilúvatar is also involved in the creation of the Dwarves, though less directly. One of the Valar initially creates the bodies of the Dwarves, but because, as noted, the secret fire of creation belongs only to Ilúvatar, the Dwarves are nothing but automatons.⁸ Because of the erring Valar’s humility,

⁷ “Men” is the term used by Tolkien to refer to all of humankind. Despite the fact that some modern readers might find this terminology sexist, I will continue to use it in reference to humans in *The Silmarillion*, for the sake of adhering to the terms found in the text.

⁸ “Valar” and “Ainur” frequently refer to the same entities. The former term is used to describe those that became stewards of Middle-Earth; the latter refers to those that remained apart from Middle-Earth, in the Void with Ilúvatar. All Valar, then, are, or were once, Ainur, but all Ainur are not Valar.

however, Ilúvatar gives to the Dwarves “a life of their own” and “their own voices,” crafting them into hardy, stubborn people of Earth unlike both the Elves and the Men (44). Yet, despite the fact that the Dwarves’ bodies were formed by a Valar, their minds and natures were crafted solely by Ilúvatar, and he remains clearly unrivaled in terms of godly power. That he is able to define these three radically different species clearly indicates that Ilúvatar is the god of all types of humanity.

Ilúvatar provides a particularly complicated example of an independent monodeity. He seems to want to manufacture an element of closeness in the relationship between himself and the mortals of Middle-Earth—a closeness that does not actually exist.⁹ Ilúvatar is generally not involved directly in the lives of mortals, instead choosing to remain in the Void “beyond the confines of the World” (Tolkien 20). Despite being the least involved deity in the independent monodeity works, he is the only god of the three to refer to the mortals as his children, the “Children of Ilúvatar” (67). It seems as though Ilúvatar may want the best of both worlds—to remain in the Void to watch events unfold from afar and to also be regarded as a deity close to his mortal followers. He cannot actually be both close and distant, however, and the text casts the god more as distant. Ilúvatar only intervenes in the first third of the text, and even then frequently does so through proxies. Though he is casting himself linguistically as a parent, Ilúvatar is actually not fulfilling a parental role. The relationship that would exist between a parent and child simply does not occur in *The Silmarillion*. Aside from creating them, Ilúvatar does nothing to guide the peoples of Middle-Earth as a parent would. Instead, he rules from afar and leaves the stewardship of the world in the hands of the Valar.

⁹ Even though the Elves are immortal, I include them as “mortals” of Middle-Earth, simply because this makes the discussion of the gods and their followers easier.

The Valar themselves may be mistakenly seen as gods by some readers. This is not a multideity work, however, for the Valar are professed quite clearly in the text *not* to be gods. Rather, they are “a unique creation of Tolkien’s—somewhere between gods and angels.”¹⁰ Ilúvatar controls the formation of the world utterly, assuring the Valar that “no theme may be played that hath not its uttermost source in me” (Tolkien 17). Ilúvatar is “the Supreme Being whose purposes no one may thwart,” and none but he can understand (Whittingham 62). For while the Valar have a great understanding of the world of Middle-Earth, “some things there are that they cannot see... for to none but himself has Ilúvatar revealed all that he has in store” (Tolkien 18). And Ilúvatar is, in fact, the creator of the Valar themselves. Thus, rather than being gods to Elves and Men, “the Valar are to these kindreds rather than their elders” (Tolkien 41). While a few mortals may be misinformed, believing that the Valar are gods, the narrative makes it clear to a reader that the only god in this independent monodeity work is Ilúvatar.

In a multideity work, of course, part of what gives a god parental authority is mortals’ belief. As noted, mortal perception and belief in a created multideity work are what give a god his or her power, for they are otherwise little different from mortals. A parental god-equal also requires the belief of mortals in order to be effective. And belief is important as well in independent multideity texts. While the existence of these gods and their authority as gods is obviously not, for the most part, in question, they are only truly able to enter into the role of parent when a mortal believes in them. While a mortal child may acknowledge the authority and existence of multiple adults, a variety of gods, only one god is the parent—the one who takes special interest in that particular mortal child, the one whom a mortal child believes will take extraordinary, superhuman action to assist him or her. It is this belief in a parent-god that leads

¹⁰ Elizabeth Whittingham, *The Evolution of Tolkien’s Mythology: A Study of the History of Middle-earth* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2008), 38. Hereafter cited in text.

mortals to ask for help, and this request for help in turn invites gods to act for them. Just as parents are able to do more for children when their help is asked for, so too are gods in independent multideity works.

The belief of mortals in independent monodeity works, however, does not seem to have such a dramatic effect on the plot of the work as a whole. Believing in the god may improve mortals' lives on a personal level, providing peace of mind. Instead of fighting against a god's plan or fighting to define one's own identity, a mortal need only trust in the deity and wait for the plan to come to fruition. While such belief might make a mortal's life easier, contributing to his or her psychological well-being, it has no effect on a monodeity's power. Even when there is doubt in the minds of mortal characters, the plans of the gods move forward. It matters little whether the mortals believe in him or not. And when mortals do trust the plans of a monodeity, their belief in that god is not like a child's belief in a parent—for while parents may seem omniscient or omnipotent, they are not. As noted, the fact that an adult may be distinguished as a parent is an indication that other adults exist. If, indeed, other adults exist as equals of the parent, their plans and stratagems may well undermine those of the parent. In a monodeity work, however, there are no other gods, no equals that can stand in the path of the deity's plan.¹¹ The monodeities lack the fallibility to which gods in multideity works, because of the existence of equally powerful gods, are subject. The fact that these monodeities do not rely on mortal belief for their power and have no worthy competition from other deities removes parental elements from them, granting them an omnipotence seen only in gods. While multideities all rely on mortal perception to some extent—for some elements of parenthood, and even adulthood, are

¹¹ That is not to say that negative forces do not try to stand in the way of the god's plan. However, as will be addressed later in this chapter, they are not the god's equals.

based on perception more than reality—monodeities remain gods, and able to exercise their power to its fullest extent, regardless of how mortals perceive them.

So, while Nocturna in *Silverwing* may not have been able to help Shade had he not believed in her, asking for her help in a moment of crisis, Aslan does not face a similar difficulty in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*. He does not require the belief of mortals for his plan to be carried out. For example, Susan and Lucy do not know that Aslan will return to life after being sacrificed on the Stone Table. That much is obvious from the text, which describes how the “sadness and shame and horror of Aslan’s death so filled their minds” that they “cried till they could cry no more” (Lewis 156-157). Aslan, however, does not need Susan and Lucy’s belief to return to life. His plan rests solidly on his own actions and his own knowledge of the magic from “the darkness before Time dawned” (163). Additionally, neither Susan or Lucy, nor their brothers, asked Aslan to act as he did. It is not like when Alanna asked the Goddess to send rain to counter the god Yahzed’s priests. Aslan’s plan is wholly his own.

The same is true of Herne’s Prophecy in *Fire Bringer*, though Herne is far less benevolent than Aslan. He does not need mortal cooperation for his plan to come to fruition. In fact, he is far more willing to strong-arm mortals through the steps of his Prophecy, apparently ready to sacrifice the good of some mortals for the good of all the animal species in the novel. When Rannoch, the main mortal character, tries to avoid his role in the Prophecy, remaining hidden in the mountains instead of venturing forth to face the evil deer Sgorr, his adoptive mother is brutally killed (Clement-Davies 390). Though she is killed by a rogue stag, Rannoch nevertheless curses Herne as she dies—Rannoch obviously feels that Herne has orchestrated events so that Rannoch, out of love for his mother and a desire for revenge, will have no choice but to challenge Sgorr (390). The wolves, too, also seem to feel as though they are unwilling

participants in Herne's plan, for, when told that they have done Herne's bidding, they "growled" and "snarled angrily," "their eyes glittering furiously" (485-486). Even when mortals try to flee from the Prophecy, the situation twists so that Herne's plan will still be carried out. Herne's Prophecy is also very different from Nocturna's Promise in *Silverwing* and *Sunwing*, for instead of encouraging mortals to act for themselves in order to fulfill it, the Prophecy simply spells out what will happen. It also begins without any mortal action. There is no rebellion such as the bats waged in the past in *Silverwing*. Rannoch is simply born, and the Prophecy begins to unfold around him (51). Regardless of the mortals' actions or desires, Herne's power compels them to behave in a certain way. This is a clear indication that his plan is a god's plan. He is not guiding particular mortals as a parent, but steering the fate of all mortals as a god.¹²

When it comes to steering the fate of mortals, Ilúvatar is perhaps more hands-off than Herne. But, from the beginning of *The Silmarillion*, it is clear to readers that the world of Middle-Earth will evolve according to Ilúvatar's plan. This plan is detailed in the first chapter of the work, as Ilúvatar and the Ainur "make in harmony together a Great Music," essentially playing out the creation and progression of Middle-Earth in a beautiful song (Tolkien 15). While even the Valar do not fully understand the music, Ilúvatar can see ahead to "the end of days" when "the themes of Ilúvatar shall be played aright, and take Being in the moment of their utterance, for all shall then understand fully his intent in their part" (Tolkien 15-16). Ilúvatar alone has complete knowledge of the world and the way that events will unfold, and he has complete control over that unfolding. Ilúvatar makes it clear that even that which seems to be a disruption of his plan is actually a part of it, saying that none "can alter the music is my despite. For he that attempteth this shall prove but mine instrument in the devising of things more

¹² Further study might be done as to how prophecies function in fantasy literature in relation to gods. More works with a focus on prophecy as well as deities would need to be read, however, in order for any worthwhile conclusions to be reached.

wonderful” (17). Everything is a part of Ilúvatar’s plan, and it will unfold as he wills it. This type of omniscience could not be attributed to anything parental, for even parents do not know what will happen in the lives of their children. Only a god acting solely as a god could be so all-knowing. Only a god could fit even the evil of the world, especially Melkor’s evil, into his plan.

Despite the power of evil entities like Melkor, however, the villains within independent monodeity works are nowhere near the equals of the god. They do often have their own sort of authority, in that they have powers or talents beyond those of mortals. They cannot, however, realistically be called negative gods, as the ill-intentioned deities in multideity works are. While, for example, Nocturna and Zotz of *Silverwing* and *Sunwing* are twins, and thus equally powerful, in independent monodeity works, great pains are often taken to clarify for readers that the enemy is not actually a god himself or herself (*Sun* 136). Melkor, for example, is one of the Valar. This very identity places him on a level below Ilúvatar, for Ilúvatar himself has created Melkor. Additionally, as both the narration and Ilúvatar himself state, since the very beginning, Ilúvatar’s composition has overtaken Melkor’s discordant music and “woven [it] into its own solemn pattern” (Tolkien 17). No matter how strenuously Melkor attempts to subvert Ilúvatar’s plan, he continuously acts as part of it. Sgorr, the enemy faced in *Fire Bringer*, is clearly far from Herne’s equal, for he is a mortal deer. Finally, the White Witch of *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* is inferior to Aslan in several ways. While he is the “King of the wood” and “the son of the great Emperor-beyond-the-Sea,” illustrious titles, she is nothing more than “one of the Jinn” (Lewis 79, 81). She is not only less than Aslan in identity, but in knowledge—for although “the Witch knew the Deep Magic, there is a magic deeper still that she did not know” (163). From the White Witch to Sgorr to Melkor, none of the villains of these independent monodeity texts even come close to equaling the gods.

The villains, moreover, realize this. They know that they cannot stand in true competition against the god, for they are fully aware that they are not gods. Simply opposing the god would not be enough, would not provide them with the requisite authority needed to influence mortals. So, instead of acknowledging the monodeity to combat him on his own terms, every villain works either to discredit the reputation of the god or to purge memory of him. Melkor, for example, attempts to discredit Ilúvatar by warping the relationship between Elves and Men. Approaching a group of Elves called the Noldor, Melkor persuades them that Ilúvatar's plan is for the Valar to hold "them captive, so that Men might come and supplant them in the kingdoms of Middle-Earth" (Tolkien 68). Instead of allowing the Elves to perceive Men as equals in the regard of Ilúvatar, Melkor tries to pit them against one another, making it seem as though Ilúvatar actually plans to favor one over the other. Sgorr, on the other hand, instead of discrediting Herne, tries to convince the deer he commands that Herne is not real. In his ever-growing herd, "it is forbidden to mention Herne" (Clement-Davies 426). This is not, according to Sgorr, because he fears Herne and the power the god wields, but because "Herne does not exist" (345). Sgorr's fixation with Herne's Prophecy, however, is an indication that Sgorr truly does believe in Herne, and is simply trying to claim the authority Herne wields as his own. As for the White Witch, she has, at least temporarily, claimed control over Narnia, declaring herself "the Queen of Narnia though she has no right to be queen at all" (Lewis 42). By making it "always winter and never Christmas," she hopes to prevent the coming of Aslan, who, as a Christ figure, understandably arrives at Christmas (19).

Additionally, in their attempts to equal the gods of the independent monodeity works, the villains often struggle to define humanity as a god would. However, their efforts never result in true definition, for they are not truly gods, not even negative gods—though they do have a

tendency for subjugation in common with the negative gods. It is blatantly stated that Melkor wanted “to subdue to his will both Elves and Men,” wishing “to have subjects and servants, and to be... a master over other wills” (Tolkien 18). In a bitter, vengeful effort to define the Elves and spite Ilúvatar, Melkor also bred “the hideous race of the Orcs” out of Elves that he had captured, “corrupted and enslaved” (50). His type of definition, however, is more akin to the sort of definition practiced by Hearteater than by Firefoot, for the Orcs never came to view Melkor as a god, loathing him as “the Master whom they served in fear” and regarding him not as a definer, but “the maker only of their misery” (Tolkien 50). Just as Melkor fails to define Ilúvatar’s mortals in any worthwhile way, Sgorr, too, only creates a cult of unnaturalness and fear. According to Sgorr, the deer should “break free from their instincts, which make them nothing but weaklings” (Clement-Davies 177). Sgorr attempts to alter the behavior of the deer dramatically, forcing multiple species to live in close proximity, denying them the cultural courtship practices that enable them to choose their own mates. However, as is elaborated throughout the work, the instincts of the deer are the direct result of definition by Herne. By attempting to “free” the deer from them, Sgorr is really trying to drag them away from the god. And just as Melkor physically changes the appearance of the Orcs, Sgorr tries to define the physical form of the deer, marking the head of each deer with a wound that would “leave a vivid scar” (Clement-Davies 350). The White Witch’s attempts to control mortals are far more subtle than scarring, however. When trying to win Edmund over to her service, she feeds him “enchanted Turkish Delight” that would make anyone who had tasted it want “more and more of it” (Lewis 38). And, when she finds that she cannot actually force a mortal to conform to her wishes, she defines them forcibly—by turning them to stone. None of these individuals are capable of the true definition that one would expect from a god—Melkor defines with

corruption, Sgorr with fear, and the White Witch with magic. The fact that, despite their efforts, the villains are not truly capable of defining humanity indicates that they are not gods.

Because the villains are not equal to the gods, they cannot be perceived as competing adults. There is no chance that they could transform a monodeity work into a multideity one, no way in which they could take on a parental role in order to define humanity. By their very inequality, however, they serve as another avenue for enforcing to the reader the fact that the gods of the monodeity works are truly gods—singular and omnipotent. While this does not necessarily make the villains impotent in the short-term, or less terrifying in the lives of mortals at any given time, it nevertheless serves as an indication for readers that there is no risk of true, long-term competition for a god in a monodeity work. Even if a villain might try to define humanity, might try to challenge the god, their attempt will not succeed. There is no way for a non-god to defeat a god in monodeity works. And since, of course, there is only one god in monodeity works, that god will always win.

The final element that makes a monodeity truly more god than parent is the fact that all human nature, everything encompassing every aspect of humanity, must be defined by one individual, one god.¹³ As a human reader, it is all but impossible to imagine the parent that would be able to guide every child equally, to be responsible for every aspect of humanity. A character so complex stretches the bonds of humanity to an unbelievable extent, and so that character cannot be human. That sort of character cannot even be one of the highly specialized, more human gods of the multideity works. The multi-faceted being that could define all of humanity could only fit into the category of god. Calling such an individual “parent” would

¹³ This could conceivably raise the question as to whether evil elements of humanity are also defined by the god. While this is fascinating to consider, such consideration would likely be the length of a thesis in and of itself. Additionally, the texts themselves are not always clear as to whether or not evil comes from the god, from one of the villains, or from humanity. Because of this, this issue will not be elaborated upon further here.

imply limits that simply do not exist for that character. The deities of the independent monodeity category are just such characters. They must be able to define all the different examples of humanity. They must be able to represent and relate to every man, woman, child, and species that makes up the pool of humanity within a given work. This quality of being all-encompassing is perhaps what most clearly places the god of an independent multideity work into the role of god rather than the role of parent.

In *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, the Pevensie children each have distinct personalities. If they existed in a world of multideities, like, for example, that of *The Song of the Lioness* quartet, each might choose a different god to define him or her. Lucy, given the gift of a healing cordial by Father Christmas, might choose to affiliate with the Goddess, who guides the hands of healers (Lewis 109). Peter, on the other hand, “silent and solemn” as he receives the gift of a sword and shield, might be more attracted to affiliation with *The Song of the Lioness*’s Mithros, a warrior god of bravery and protection (108). Aslan, however, must appeal to both Peter and Lucy, and Edmund and Susan and all other mortals. He must present humanity in a way to which all humans can relate. This is reflected in the different reactions of the children when they first hear the name of Aslan—“Peter felt suddenly brave and adventurous. Susan felt as if some delicious smell or some delightful strain of music had just floated by her. And Lucy got the feeling you have when you wake up in the morning and realize that it is the beginning of the holidays” (68). Aslan means something different to each of them. This indicates clearly that Aslan can mean different things to different people, can define multiple versions of humanity. This is further reinforced by the fact that Aslan obviously acts to define the humanity of the Narnian characters as well, a group more diverse than a set of siblings. As noted, Aslan’s camp is filled with many creatures of many different species. He manages to appeal to them all, to

offer them an example of humanity to which all of them—from the flighty, friendly Mr. Tumnus, to the down-to-earth Beavers, to the overeager lion from the Witch’s palace, to the bumbling but good-natured giant Rumblebuffin—can relate.

Fire Bringer’s Herne defines a cast of mortals just as diverse as Aslan’s Narnians. Deer and ravens, moles and seals, wolves and humans themselves—Herne relates to them all. By introducing the reindeer, the text makes it clear that Herne is more than just a regional deity. For though most of the animals of the novel come from a land resembling pre-medieval Scotland, humans have transported and released a small group of reindeer into the setting as well (Clement-Davies 294). These representatives of a distant land worship a deity called Hoern, who, from the stories they tell about him, is simply Herne known by another name (493). The fact that the reindeer worship Herne, despite the fact that they come from a great distance away, is an indication that Herne is the sole deity extant within the novel, who still manages to relate to multiple forms of humanity. The forms of humanity that Herne governs are not all represented by deer, of course. When discussing the many ways of Herne, Rannoch informs his fellows that Herne is not only a god of deer, not only a healing god, but a god of wolves as well—“For if Herne is a healer, he is a hunter, too” (476). Herne, then, is both giver and taker of life, and he represents the very different types of humanity associated with these different ways of life. As is seen in other novels, Herne’s physical definition of his mortal followers is a sign of his defining of multiple elements of their lives. At the beginning of the novel, a red deer storyteller offers a tale to a group of fawns detailing how Herne removed his antlers and gave them to the deer (19). To the deer’s imagining, Herne is an antlered animal like themselves. Later, however, as the raven Crak is helping to guide Rannoch and his companions through a snowstorm, he curses the weather with the epithet “Herne’s beak” (285). This is one of a few subtle, but important,

indications that other creatures of the work, other types of humanity, see themselves as being physically defined by Herne, just as the deer do. Such is a clear indication that Herne encompasses many kinds of humanity into one, that he is many things to many different creatures.

As for Ilúvatar of *The Silmarillion*, he also encompasses all of humanity. If he indeed has crafted the entire song, the whole unfolding of the world of Middle-Earth, if nothing happens without his knowledge, then he must at the very least have known of, and planned for, all of the different iterations of humanity within that world. Ilúvatar is god and creator of both Elves and Men, as well as Dwarves, who, as noted earlier, are very different creatures, with very different cultures and very different outlooks on the world. His creation of these diverse forms of humanity indicate that he himself exemplifies all versions of humanity. The Valar themselves, though it is debatable whether or not theirs is a form of humanity, nevertheless reveal to a reader the complexity of Ilúvatar. They are described from their first moment of introduction as “the offspring of [Ilúvatar’s] thought” (Tolkien 15). They, in all their diversity, all have their roots in Ilúvatar. Even Melkor, for all the evil that he works, is one of the Valar. This may imply, perhaps not reassuringly, that, indeed, all elements of humanity, both good and ill, stem from the monodeity.

Since one god can and does fulfill the definition needs of all mortals, there is no cause for the god-shopping that takes place in multideity works, for different versions of humanity are contained in one deity, not split between different gods. Because there are no other legitimate gods for a mortal to follow, the element of mortal choice seems vastly less important in the monodeity category. Belief, for example, is important on an individual level, for it often matters a great deal to a human whether or not he or she believes in the god. It is, however, less

important, as noted, on the level of plot, for the plans of the monodeities proceed often without mortals' belief. The same may be true of choice. For a particular mortal within a particular text, choosing to follow the god, to accept one's definition by the god, may be the most important choice he or she ever makes. While the response of gods to mortal choice is not addressed at length, it may be important to the god as well, for perhaps that sort of choice would make a god's plan progress more smoothly. A reader, however, may perceive that, as with belief, choice is important to an individual character—but not important to the progression of the world. What causes the world to progress is the plan of the monodeity, upon which human choice often has little impact. Ilúvatar's plan for the world has been scripted since before the world began, and though only he has knowledge of it, a reader is made well-aware that he has that knowledge, well-aware that the progression of the world falls in line with Ilúvatar's plan. The reader, too, is aware of all the steps of Herne's Prophecy as they are fulfilled. While the mortal characters may only perceive this in bits and pieces, a reader is transported throughout the world of *Fire Bringer* to see each element of the Prophecy and shown that it has all happened as Herne dictated it would. While *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* is presented more from a mortal's standpoint, even this text implies that the history of the world unfolds according to some greater plan, for Aslan's knowledge of existence "before Time dawned" intimates that Time and all that exist within it have come about according to the design of the god (Lewis 163).

A reader, then, understands that, while choice may be important on an individual level, it does not have great impact on the world as a whole. While a monodeity's plan might be carried out differently because of a mortal's choice, it will still be carried out. Mortal choice, then, may have an effect on the short-term progression of a world. In the long run, however, the way in which a world develops is left in the hands of the god. In independent multideity works, a

particular mortal's choice to follow a god, to believe in a god as parent, often affects the outcome of the plot as a whole. Tailchaser, calling upon Firefoot as he does, is able to save the world from the monster spawned by Hearteater. Choosing to believe in gods in created multideity works is even more crucial, for perceiving an individual as a god in these texts is often what makes that individual a god. The world of independent monodeity works, however, will not rise or fall by the choice of mortals. The monodeities themselves are not like parents in relation to the mortals, for even in a parent-child relationship with a young child, the choices of the child have some bearing on the outcome of events. Here, however, the god's plan is always going to come to pass. This in and of itself means that the deity does not fill a parental role, for even the strictest parents are open to some give-and-take with their children. A monodeity, then, exists all but exclusively in the role of god. In independent monodeity texts, the positive element associated with choice in multideity works is replaced by a positivity linked to certainty. Thus, even though a mortal's choice may not have the same impact as in multideity works, a reader is reassured that, in spite of this fact, the outcome of the world is certain. The god has a plan. While multideity works demonstrate that mortals may change the outcome of the world through interaction with the gods, monodeity works encourage their readers to take comfort in faith—for even if the mortals within a text may not find it evident in the short-term, it is certain that, in the long-term, the god has a plan.

The balance of choice and certainty would likely be fascinating to observe in created monodeity works. However, turning a few pages here, readers will not find an expansive chapter on this would-be fourth category, expounding upon examples of works that contain one god whose existence as a god is dependent upon mortal perception. This is because, in fantasy

literature, the created monodeity is the rarest of the gods. In fact, of all the fantasy novels sampled, there are none that are purely created monodeity works. The closest is perhaps a segment of *Jurgen, A Comedy of Justice* by James Branch Cabell, and, even then, this segment of the text containing a created monodeity is just that—a segment. Jurgen ventures through so many strange worlds and dimensions throughout the text that he encounters many beings that may arguably be gods. Koshchei the Deathless, for example, who sends Jurgen on his journey and then twists reality so that it perhaps never occurred, certainly has supernatural powers akin to a god's.¹⁴ The presence of other possible deities means that this is not wholly a monodeity work. As Jurgen travels through multiple worlds, there is not only one god.

There is, however, one individual in the text who believes with steadfast determination in only one god, and she is Jurgen's grandmother. The deity that she believes in is called "the god of Jurgen's grandmother," an indication to the readers that she has indeed created him (Cabell 181). Upon her death, Jurgen's grandmother arrived at the portal to the afterlife and found it was not the afterlife she had believed to exist. Instead of accepting this, however, she approached the guardians of the portal and demanded to be taken to the afterlife that she *knew* with certainty—for she had believed in it all her life—existed. Rather than fighting with such a formidable old woman, Koshchei the Deathless introduces her to the One Supreme God—who has just been created to suit the expectations of Jurgen's grandmother (184). The power of Jurgen's grandmother's belief results in the creation of her own heaven, complete with the one, true god, who is, in fact, the one true god because she believes him to be. There is a sense of mild bemusement in this heaven, for God, per the grandmother's belief, should be the supreme entity. His strings, however, are being pulled by the belief of Jurgen's grandmother. As a venerable

¹⁴ James Branch Cabell, *Jurgen: A Comedy of Justice*, 1919 (Rockville: Wildside Press, 2002), 11, 224. Hereafter cited in text.

elder, completely confident in her own authority, she has moved so far beyond any connection with a child role that she has, in fact, created a monodeity within a book of multideities. She is part and parcel to the existence of one of the only created monodeities found in any work. Even then, however, the monodeity is only a monodeity for Jurgen's grandmother, not for any other characters. And he is only a monodeity because she believes him to be one.

The reasons why created monodeities are so rare in fantasy literature are relatively obvious. While mortals are obviously capable of creating multiple gods within a work, there is a difference between multideities and monodeities. Creating multideities simply means creating more authorities to define humanity. Creating a monodeity, however, would mean creating *the* authority. Which of the many varied and diverse mortals in a world would have the ability to create the one, true god of all mortals? It would likely be impossible for any one mortal to conceive and create a single god that would encompass all the myriad forms of humanity. What, indeed, would grant this particular mortal the right to create the god that would have power over all mortals, the right to render their version of humanity as better than all others? And if, in fact, the god were created by all mortals, how could there be any agreement as to the form it would take? Regardless, the resulting monodeity would be far too limited to incorporate all of humanity, and for a monodeity in particular, it is important that the god be able to define all elements of humanity, in all the many forms humanity may take.

Conclusion

The Mortals at the End of this Book:

The Gods, their Readers, and Human Agency

After establishing the probability that, in fantasy texts, different types of gods enter into different relationships with mortals and so define humanity in different ways, I set out to examine the roles of gods as characters in fantasy worlds. The first type of gods, the independent multideities, acted as parents in their relationships with child-like mortals. Such a relationship was characterized by the special interest particular gods would take in particular mortals, as well as by the parent-gods' attempts to guide their mortal affiliates toward independent action, as parents would ideally guide their children in the world of reality. Dissimilar to the world of reality, however, is the fact that these gods and mortals exist in a static relationship, with the gods persisting as adults in the world and the mortals forever remaining children. This continuation of the parent and child roles in independent multideity works is emphasized when, even though a mortal character grows, changes, and becomes more independent throughout a narrative, he or she still relies upon the god to help him or her succeed against a superhuman foe.

This is not the case in created multideity works. In these fantasy worlds, though the gods are still the adults and the mortals still children, the mortal children, often unbeknownst to them, have grown up. It is the task of a god-equal, one often perceived as being a god himself or herself, who can claim similar defining authority to the gods, to act in a parental role. This god-equal informs mortals that they do not need to rely on the gods any longer, that the gods do not truly exist on a plane above that of humankind, and that mortals should be their own authorities, should act independently to achieve their own definitions. Just as a parent may coax his or her

grown child into independent adulthood, so too do the god-equals, the parents of the created multideity works, nudge their mortal children toward self-definition.

In independent monodeity works, however, the relationship between god and mortal is less that which might exist between parent and child, and more like one might expect between an omnipotent god and his worshipper. Monodeities are perceived as more godlike than parental by virtue of their absolute authority within a fantasy world, by their power to act without human belief, by the fact that they have no other gods—no other adults—to rival them, and by their simultaneous definition of all elements of humanity. These same traits are what make the independent monodeities unbelievable as parent figures, for parents, despite what small children may believe, are not all-powerful. As for created monodeities, the gods of the fourth and final category, these are rarely found in fantasy works, likely because of the many problematic elements that would arise if one mortal, or even several, were able to create the one, true god.

God-characters in general are likely used in fantasy literature because they are such efficient definers of humanity. Their effectiveness stems from the fact that they are—as exemplified by the Great Mother Goddess in *The Song of the Lioness* quartet, who is simultaneously “the most perfect woman, and not a woman at all”—at once both similar to and different from humanity, whether that of the mortal characters or that of the reader (*Woman* 157). The fact that the god is a character renders him or her, even if in only a small way, familiar to a reader—there is some element to which a reader can relate. The version of humanity displayed by the god-as-character is similar enough to that found in the reader’s own experiences as to be recognizable as humanity, as to almost make the god human. However, the gods are also notably different than the human characters. Their identity as gods, their potential for authority, places them on a level not only distinct from, but above, that of humans, a state which in turn provides

the gods the authority necessary to define humanity. Yet because they are also characters, there is enough humanity in them that a reader may recognize their definition of humanity from the world of reality and, while perhaps not accepting it as his or her own version of humanity, will at least consider it a valid one. In terms of this similarity and difference, the gods are like Armit's horizon—enough like mortals to present a definition of humanity recognizable to readers, and different enough from mortals to back up that definition with divine authority. Just as fantasy literature itself encourages Egoff's fresh vision, the gods, too, encourage it, allowing readers to see humanity defined not only by, but on, a divine plane.

Gods are not only used to present a version of humanity, but also to affirm to a mortal character or reader that a specific definition of humanity has validity. Living according to the definition of humanity set down by a positive parent-god in an independent multideity work, a mortal finds his or her actions validated, because they stem from the teachings of a parent. By following these teachings, one is being true to one's parent, and, even in a culture that seems to set much store by rebellion, there is still something encouraging in realizing that one is acting in a manner that earns a parent's approval. The same holds true for monodeities. Even though these are more god than parent, mortals nevertheless may find comfort and affirmation in the fact that they are living according to the plan of a positive god. Following a path of humanity that fits into a god's plan also gives a mortal confirmation that he or she is doing something right. Even in created multideity works, those works in which the mortals have the most agency, a mortal's following of a parental god-equal is regarded as positive. It is through the relationship between mortal and god that mortals are encouraged to act for themselves—which fits into the god-equal's definition of an independent humanity. In fantasy works, mortals fitting their actions and beliefs into a positive god's definition of humanity will find those actions and beliefs

validated. Even more so, if the mortals conform their identities to the version of humanity presented by a god, they may then receive affirmation as to the legitimacy of their own humanity.

Mortal readers, when observing characters to which they emotionally connect, may perceive elements of their own humanity enacted and legitimized in a fantasy setting. When a character acts out a version of humanity both recognizable and relatable to a reader, a version of humanity affirmed by a god, a reader then may feel that his or her own choices are affirmed within the text. Readers who, for example, feel that they need not conform to stereotypical gender roles may relate to Alanna in *The Song of the Lioness*, and then feel that their views are legitimized when the Goddess, too, agrees that Alanna's womanhood should not prevent her from becoming a knight. As a character's decisions, beliefs, and values are validated in the narrative, readers relating to that character could find those elements of their own humanity validated as well. On the other hand, of course, readers may disagree with the definition of humanity that a god presents in any given work—from the Crooked God's thievery to Herne's intense competitiveness to Firefoot's rejection of society's boundaries. Relating less closely to the mortals who follow the teachings of these particular gods, readers may well find that divine affirmation of certain actions strikes them as inappropriate or simply wrong. Rather than being heartened that an author has chosen to have a god present a definition of humanity with which one agrees, a reader is instead unsettled that the deities of a fantasy world would sanction a belief or element of character so removed from a reader's own definition of right. However, this very feeling of wrongness would ideally lead a reader to introspection, toward examination of what seemed wrong in that definition of humanity and why. Depending, too, upon a reader's perception of the nature of a defining god—whether said deity appeared to lean more toward the

positive or negative—one might have to question more closely whether a particular definition of humanity would always be wrong, or whether there were occasions when it might be justified, even right. Problematic elements in Zotz's definition of humanity in *Silverwing* and *Sunwing*, for example, would be of no great concern to a reader, but problematic elements in Nocturna's certainly could be. Even if a reader does not agree with a definition of humanity presented by a god, that very disagreement could well encourage a more nuanced understanding of one's own humanity, a clearer perception of which elements of humanity are right for an individual, and which are not.

While god-characters across categories are able to define humanity by virtue of being both similar to and different from humans, and are also able to affirm a mortal's decision to follow a certain path of humanity, it is only within the specific categories that a mortal's agency in his or her own definition is addressed. It is in the multideity works that mortals have some say as to the definition of humanity they wish to follow, and it is in multideity works that a mortal's free will appears important. Multideity works also place a high stake on individuality. There are different definitions of humanity for different people, for humanity itself in these works is presented as diverse and multifaceted. An author might choose to create an independent multideity work in order to convey that mortals, as individuals, should be free to choose their own paths. Because mortals can select, from a number of options, which gods to worship, which versions of humanity to follow, they have the freedom to participate in their own definition.

The emphasis on free will in independent multideity texts conveys to readers that they, too, have power over their own humanity. Just as the mortal characters to which a reader relates may choose which gods to follow, and thus, what kind of people to be, so too may a reader choose his or her own humanity. While choosing a god in these works may be analogous to choosing a

faith, it may also be readily likened to choosing a model for living. The fact that multiple gods, and often multiple positive gods, exist in these works indicates the different models of living, different definitions of humanity, may be equally valid. When reading *Tailchaser's Song*, a reader may not identify closely with the independent rovers who follow the path of humanity presented by Firefoot. Rather, he or she may feel that the closely connected, intricate society of Whitewind's court offers a version of humanity toward which he or she can better relate. The reader, however, would not be able to deny that, while these versions of humanity are different, one is not inherently superior to the other. Even if a reader cannot associate completely with one version of humanity depicted, that reader is nevertheless reassured the other versions of humanity not only exist, but likely have the same validity within the fantasy world—or within the world of reality.

In comparison to other categories, the independent multideity category contains a proportionately larger number of children's or young adult books. This likely modal audience of younger readers is reflected in the fact that, while characters in these works are certainly independent, they often rely, even if only intermittently, on the gods, their metaphorical parents, for help—and feel no shame in doing so. In the version of humanity these works present, it is certainly good, as a mortal, to do things for oneself. However, it is not only accepted but expected that one would seek assistance from a higher power. Younger readers, then, are encouraged to act independently, but simultaneously reassured that reliance on a higher power, a parental power, is acceptable. Simply because the books are marketed for a younger audience, however, does not mean that they reach only a younger audience—for the gods, while symbolically like parents, are not literally so. The author made them gods, and so their authority in a reader's mind does not end when a reader reaches adulthood. The presentation of mortals as

both being able to choose the definition of humanity they follow and being guided by a higher power would likely appeal to readers, of varying ages, who feel that a balance of free will and faith characterizes humanity. Human beings adhering to this definition, then, would likely believe that they have some control in their own lives, over their own choices, but also that a higher power has some vested interest in their well-being. This higher power would not only help them through challenging times, but would also approve of their behavior and their choices in situations when divine intervention would not be needed. Those readers who are faith-filled and free-willed may find the definition of humanity presented by independent multideity works one to which they can relate—one in which mortals are both willing to act for themselves and willing to act in accordance with the teachings of a higher power, be it perceived as parental or divine.

The multideity elements of independence and free will are taken to the nth degree in created multideity works. In this sense, created multideity works are less about choice and more about realization and decision. A mortal here need not limit oneself to a pre-packaged version of humanity. Choosing which god to follow is decidedly less important than deciding how to create one's own humanity. By realizing that they are as much adults as the gods they have created, mortals in these works are able to take almost complete control of their own definition. Rather than perceiving events from the standpoint of mortal protagonists, readers of these texts are shown events from the gods' perspectives. In this, an author may be setting the stage for his or her readers to relate with the gods. Though readers may relate to all god-characters in some sense, created multideities often move beyond acting in human-like ways to acting human. The ease of relation between reader and god may in fact be an early indication that the gods here are

not so much divine as human with an advantage or two. By putting human readers on the same level as the gods, these texts intimate that the gods are themselves human.

Those readers who are proponents of free will find that created multideity works not only value it highly, but present it as a preferred element of human existence. There is no longer reliance on parental gods for definition here. Rather, mortal characters and readers are reassured that they can define themselves. Those forces that define humanity are, in fact, created by human belief. Since it is humanity that gives the gods their power, it is humanity that has the real power. There is no faith in anything greater or any higher power here—which makes a certain amount of sense, as the modal audience for all the created multideity works sampled is an adult one. While adults may certainly have parents, they are no longer bound in the strict defining relationship that governs interactions between a parent and a young child. That the readers here are adults is perhaps a good thing—for the message of these texts is in some way empowering, and in some way terrifying. Each human, each reader, has the ability to be master of his or her fate. Having this sort of control over one's life may certainly be heartening to a reader. However, this means that one must also be responsible for all that one does or fails to do. It means that humans are responsible for all that is good and all that is evil in the world. There are no positive gods guiding people toward rightness, and no negative gods leading them astray—there are only people. While this indicates that humans can make their own choices, it also means there is no greater power to help people if they make wrong choices. As the many negative created gods in these works demonstrate to readers, people can certainly place their belief in the wrong thing. This might lead a reader to ask what gods they might have created, what they are allowing to define them

Monodeities move to the other extreme. Instead of presenting free will as the order of the day, these works instead reassure a reader of fate. This is not to say that mortals are unable to make their own decisions, but rather that certain outcomes are assured regardless of what mortals decide. While fate and destiny are certainly not always comforting concepts, when one's fate is held in the hands of a positive and all-powerful god, one can hopefully be more confident of a positive outcome. Whatever happens, even if it seems senseless, happens to further the god's plan. It happens because of fate. Created monodeities, then, in addition to presenting the problem of who gets to create the god, are not effective because they completely derail the element of fate. If mortals can create the monodeity that creates the plan, then they have, essentially, returned to free will.

Independent monodeity works, however, are firmly entrenched in fate, assuring readers that, even though mortals might not be able to see the plan of the god, the plan exists. Instead of encouraging readers to take reassurance in their own power—be it one's ability to choose a model of humanity to follow or one's ability to define humanity for oneself—readers can take reassurance from the fact that the god is in control. This is confirmed when these works clearly show the reader the actions of the god, be it Aslan returning to life, Herne fulfilling the Prophecy, or Ilúvatar creating Middle-earth. If a god is in control, mortals are not—which some readers would certainly view as the downside, or dark side, to fate. Readers might find solace, however, in the fact that the gods of these works are not the symbolic parents or created deities of the multideity works, but are more thoroughly removed from mortals. Rather than being subject to human fallibility, the deities here are on a level far above humanity. It is not another human who controls one's fate, but something far greater.

In addition to presenting worlds governed by fate, independent monodeity works also imply connection between humans. Rather than allowing a reader to relish one's individuality, whether through an individual relationship with a parent-god or through the crafting of one's own version of humanity, these works enforce a sense, not of conformity, but of connection. While multideity works lean more toward presenting a god for every version of humanity, in monodeity works, all forms of humanity come from the one god. Despite differences that readers might perceive between themselves and other people, the message here is that all people have the same roots in the divine. All human beings are, in some way, the same—and, because the god has a plan, it is likely that many of the differences that exist between humans are simply another part of that plan. It makes sense, then, that independent monodeity works do not seem to be geared either toward young readers or adult readers in particular, for in the sample texts of this category, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* is a children's book, *Fire Bringer* a young adult novel, and *The Silmarillion* obviously intended for a modal audience of adults. The idea of fate, and the idea of faith in the monodeity, is not limited to either children or adults. The idea of belief in the one true god and the elements of human connection are not limited to the definition of humanity associated with any one stage of life, but are applicable to all.

While the gods in fantasy literature all work to define humanity, the different relationships that emerge between mortals and different types of gods reveal that the defined humanity can take many forms. It can be a celebration of individuality or a comforting sense of connection. It may be governed by either free will or fate. These works may depict a reader's own values and beliefs, affirming them for a reader by presenting them as coming from the mouth of god. These works may also complicate a reader's beliefs regarding humanity, demonstrating how humanity may take many equally valid forms or may, while different, all stem from the same source.

Finally, these works may serve as a jumping off point for a reader to enter into a debate that has likely gone on for centuries: whether human beings have free will, or whether human actions are governed by fate—and which would be the better scenario for humanity. While it is highly unlikely that, in the world of reality, a mortal will receive a direct and incontrovertible answer from the gods, one can nevertheless observe, in the similar-yet-different worlds of fantasy how free will or fate might play out, if one or the other were true. The more one examines works of fantasy, the more one can complicate and characterize one's own views regarding these, and perhaps other, questions in human life, and the better one can understand one's own definition of humanity. There are untold untapped sources in the fantasy genre. According to Robert Reilly, editor of *The Transcendent Adventure: Studies of Religion in Science Fiction/Fantasy*, fantasy texts, and the relationship between mortals and gods within them, remain “an almost inexhaustible field for critical inquiry” (Reilly 5). Fantasy works also remain fields for personal inquiry, for exploring and expanding one's own opinions regarding faith, choice, free will, fate, and belief itself, for finding for oneself an answer to the question of what it means to be human.

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